

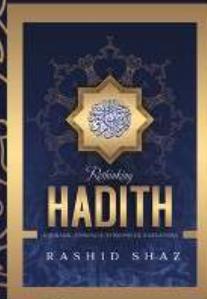
حَمْدُ اللّٰهِ الْمُبْرَكُ
سُبْحٰنَ رَبِّ الْعٰالَمِينَ
لَا إِلٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ

Rethinking
HADITH

A QURANIC APPROACH TO PROPHETIC NARRATIONS

R A S H I D S H A Z

Rethinking **HADITH**



Rethink Everything You Know About Hadith

In the audacious pages of *Rethinking Hadith*, Rashid Shaz tears down the walls built by centuries of convention. This book isn't just a challenge—it's a rebellion against the norm, advocating a fierce pilgrimage back to the Quranic roots of Islam. With razor-sharp insight, Shaz declares the Hadiths, those revered as 'unrecited revelation' and an alternative legal compass, should not eclipse the luminous authority of the Quran. This book is an invitation, no, a provocation to strip away the layers of historical dust and discover the raw, unfiltered voice of the Prophet. Are you ready to challenge everything and see the Hadith in a revolutionary light?



Rashid Shaz is a force of nature in the world of Islamic thought, renowned for his reformist writing, audacious ideas, and relentless activism. As the mind behind Idrak, his magnum opus, he has sparked a dynamic tradition of re-reading the Quran, daring to seek fresh answers for our times. From his youthful days founding the Milli Parliament to steering Milli Times International and the provocative online journal Future Islam, Rashid Shaz has been a relentless advocate for shaking up the stagnant Muslim mindset. He carved out a special course at Aligarh Muslim University, dedicated to nurturing a new generation of scholars—ulema and aalimat—continuing his tireless mission to inspire change. Now, as he navigates the autumn of his life, Shaz pours his energy into writing, reflecting, and mentoring the next wave of young leaders. He helms Peace India International, a bold not-for-profit based in New Delhi, and lends his voice as an ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

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Rethinking

Hadith

A Quranic Approach to Prophetic Narrations

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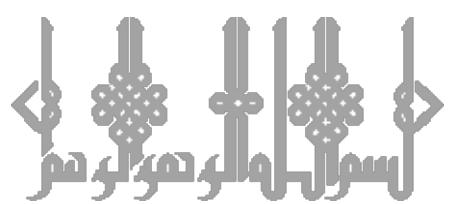
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١٨٥ ﴿ فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴾

So, tell me, what Hadith—what captivating narrative—
after this sacred text will they ever come to believe in?

(Quran, 77:50)

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُّتَشَابِهًا مَّثَانِيٍ تَقْشِعُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ
الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَى ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ذُلِّكَ
هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادِ
﴾

God has revealed the finest Hadith: a Book that is
perfectly consistent and full of reiteration. It sends shivers
down the spines of those who fear their Lord, then their skins
and hearts soften at the remembrance of Allah. This is the
guidance of Allah, leading whom He wills. And for those whom
Allah lets stray, there is no guide.

(Quran, 39:23)

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Preface

Rethinking Hadith takes you back to the days of the Prophet Muhammad when the Quranic text was self-sufficient—a signpost for the submitters, requiring no knowledge of the tomes of the fuqaha and hadith transmitters who deemed it necessary to provide a contextual story for each verse. The stories that claim to highlight the context are often unreliable and contradictory, and instead of clarifying, they obfuscate the Quranic intent. It is misleading to believe that God revealed two revelations: the Quran and the Sunnah. The Quran is a fixed text passed down to the ummah in one book form, transmitted from one generation of Muslims to the next. In contrast, the Sunnah has no fixed text, nor does it claim to be the Prophet's words verbatim. Moreover, there are no definitive books that claim to preserve the 23 years of momentous days and nights of the Prophet.

Those who equate the hadith with the Quran, believing it to hold the keys to divine understanding, or even viewing it as a lesser, ‘unrecited revelation’, are bound for a profound disappointment. This so-called secondary revelation was never wholly preserved—not by the early caliphs, nor by the successive generations of Muslims. What we have today, known as the Sihah Sittah for Sunnis or the four revered compendiums by Shia authors, are mere snippets, fragmented echoes of what the Prophet is reported to have said or done. We do not even have any collection of the Friday sermons that the Prophet delivered during his 10 years' stay in Medina. The reason is simple; in the presence of God's own book, the ummah never thought of another book of guidance. The Quran suffices for them. The Prophet had instructed

them not to write anything from him other than the Quran: *La taktabu 'anni ghair al-Quran.*

Preserving the Quran's centrality was no easy task. The companions, many of them now settled in far places like Ibn Masoud in Kufa and Abu Musa Ashari in Basra, and Obi bin Kaab in Medina, etc., had attained social prominence due to their mastery in Quranic teaching as they had the honor of learning from the Prophet himself. They had their own copies where they had written notes on the margins. In a way, they had attained some sort of authority on the Quran. When Islam spread far and wide and reports of differences in Quranic recitations started pouring into Medina, Caliph Uthman took a far-reaching measure. He ordered the creation of several copies from the *Mushaf Imam*, the master copy, and sent them to various regional capitals. To curb the solitary reports or *ahad* information claiming that the Prophet taught this verse like this or that, or that the verse was initially recited like this, Uthman ordered all other copies to be destroyed.

By now, the scholars of the Quran and their devoted pupils had risen to such heights of social eminence that Uthman's initiative struck them not merely as a reform but as a personal affront. How could they possibly abandon the manuscripts they had crafted with such painstaking dedication—manuscripts annotated with their own interpretations and insights? These weren't just texts; they were extensions of their intellect, imbued with the personal significance of their scholarly journeys and their intimate encounters with divine wisdom.

They resisted fiercely. Thus, the politics of the Quran took a turbulent turn. Uthman's intent to confiscate these cherished copies—copies that bore not only the words of God but also the marginal notes of personal enlightenment—was seen as an erasure of their scholarly identities. Moreover, these manuscripts were not mere academic

exercises; they were repositories of cherished memories, tangible links to the days they had spent in the presence of the Prophet, echoing with the remnants of his voice, his teachings, his spiritual essence. The emotional weight of what they were asked to relinquish was overwhelming.

Uthman's concern was profound. As the leader of the ummah, he carried the weighty responsibility of ensuring that the Quran remained pristine, free from the shadows of textual discrepancies or the subtle distortions of individual interpretations. His actions transcended mere administrative decisions; they were acts of fierce guardianship over the spiritual integrity of the Muslim community. Yet, these necessary measures were met with significant resistance, particularly from scholars in Kufa, sparking a fierce scholarly opposition that heralded one of the darkest chapters in Islamic history: the first fitnah. As political storms raged and the siege around Caliph Uthman's house intensified, historians note that some three hundred qurra, deeply invested in their own interpretations and prestige, surged from Kufa to Medina. This formidable assembly challenged Uthman's authority, marking a critical moment of conflict over the Quran's control. By instituting an official, verified copy based on the Mushaf Imam, Uthman not only affirmed Medina's centrality but also curtailed the influence of individual scholars like Abu Musa Ashari or Ibn Masood and their peers. Scholars hold a revered place in Islam, but Uthman's message was clear: in the face of ummah unity, personal prominence must yield to central authority. This underscored a pivotal tenet: no one stands above the collective interest of the ummah.

The Quran, a central masterpiece, was thought a necessary possession for the claimants of power and caliphate. When the Umayyad in Spain claimed caliphal power, they paraded with a copy of the Osmanic Mushaf, the swords of the Prophet, and his other relics; the Abbasid had the Prophet's cloak and other relics besides the official

state copy of the Quran. So, it is claiming some sort of monopoly on the official version by way of political legitimacy. In our own time, when Saudi rulers established a Quran printing press in Medina, rolling over millions of copies of *Mushaf Madina*, and thus became the central authority to issue God's words, the King of Morocco found solace in issuing *Mushaf Muhammadi*, named after King Muhammad VI of Morocco. The specialty of the Morocco Quran? A less known reading; the Warsh, which owes its popularity in the region to some Maliki fuqaha who found in ahad recitation some scope for Quranic understanding.

But the fault lies not solely with the fuqaha of Almaghreb. Shafei, the great advocate of Hadith who had the audacity of naming his fiqh compendium as "the mother book" or *Kitab al-Umm*, had propounded in *Al-Risalah*: "وَعِلْمُ الْخَاصَّةِ سُنَّةٌ مِّنْ خَيْرِ الْخَاصَّةِ يَغْرِبُهَا الْعُلَمَاءُ وَلَمْ يُكَافِهَا غَيْرُهُمْ وَهِيَ مُؤْجُودَةٌ" "فِيهِمْ أُوْفَى بِعَصْبِهِمْ بِصِدْقِ الْخَاصِّ الْمُخْبِرِ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ هُنَّا وَهَذَا الْلَّازِمُ لِأَهْلِ الْعِلْمِ أَنْ يَصِيرُوا إِلَيْهِ". In their misplaced enthusiasm for searching the khaas, our scholars have so much empowered the ahad narrative that now they have birthed many parallel Qurans. The proponents of the Morocco Quran alone are not to be blamed; the Medina complex for Quran printing has also started printing other so-called qira'at in beautifully adorned mushaf form – thanks to the politics of the Sunnah and their proponents. Swayed by the traditionalist Hadith scholars who view our common Quran as just another version and naively call it *Hafs un Asim*, have placed the ahad reportage or hadith to such a high pedestal that now it has become a qadhi on the Quran itself.

Ahad narratives, no matter how widely touted or steeped in tradition, cannot redefine the truth that has been handed down through unbroken chains of transmission—an undeniable tawatur that the Quran itself prescribes: "وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَمَّةً وَسَطَّا لَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونُ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا". The faith has flowed to us, not as a trickle or a stream diverted by individual interpretations, but as a mighty river of collective

memory and oral tradition, from the Prophet to the first believers, and from them to each succeeding generation.

These solitary reports, these whispers of ahad, belong not at the heart of our faith but on the periphery—captured in the dusty volumes of scholarly curiosity, revered perhaps, but never allowed to disrupt the core of the Official Quranic Codex. In his unyielding commitment to this truth, Uthman staked his life, becoming a martyr not just to preserve the physical integrity of the Quran, but its spiritual sanctity. Those who champion this cause today, who insist on the primacy of the Quran over fragmented narratives, tread a path fraught with controversy, often branded as *munkar hadith*—rejectors of traditions deemed sacred by others.

Yet here we stand at a crossroads, where the battle for the soul of our faith reaches its zenith. You are called upon to make a choice—a decision of profound consequence: Will you align with the Quran, unaltered and majestic, or will you let it be overshadowed by the myriad, solitary reports that threaten to dilute its divine message? This is not just a choice. It is a declaration of where you stand in the narrative of history and truth.

Rashid Shaz

Reconfiguring Our Understanding of Hadith

Revelation is absolute, a complete universe unto itself. If we find ourselves still searching for guidance after it has been handed down, then perhaps we must confront the uncomfortable truth about its supposed completeness. The Quran makes it clear that when guidance descends, it comes fully formed and detailed. Consider the verses where it states, "ثُمَّ أَتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ تَمَامًا" {...} "Then We gave Moses the Book, completed..." } (Al-An'am:154) and وَكَتَبْنَا لَهُ فِي الْأَلْوَاحِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَوْعِظَةً وَتَفْصِيلًا { Al-A'raf:145 and "كُلُّ شَيْءٍ ... For him, on the tablets, we detailed everything—every piece of advice, every detail..." } (Al-A'raf:145), highlighting that after the Torah's revelation, the people of Israel lacked nothing further. The Quran challenges us, "...أَفَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ أَبْتَغِي حُكْمًا وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكِتَابَ مُفْصَلًا" { Should I look for a judge other than Allah, when He Himself has given you the Book elaborated in full detail... } (Al-An'am:115). It's a clarion call reminding us that revelation is not just complete—it embodies the epitome of completion, leaving no room for additions.

Whether we're talking about the revelations handed down to ancient prophets or the Holy Quran that graced the last Prophet, peace be upon him, their roles as definitive and exhaustive guides are pivotal. Without recognizing them as such, we're essentially questioning the very core of what it means to receive divine revelation. And let's not forget, the Quran isn't just another chapter in the saga of spiritual texts—it's the closing argument, the ultimate seal of divine testimony meant to last until the world's final echoes. Thus, all the wisdom imparted to previous prophets, along with their 'books' or

'admonitions,' now converge in this single, encompassing scripture. This isn't just a collection of old messages; it's a blueprint for tomorrow, a script crafted not just to affirm what came before but to articulate a clear, unambiguous plan moving forward. The Quran itself declares: {
وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أَنْ يَفْتَرِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدِيهِ وَتَفْصِيلُ الْكِتَابِ لَا رِبٌّ فِيْهِ مِنْ رَبٍّ
كان هذا القرآن أن يفتري من دون الله ولكن تصديق الذي بين يديه وتفصيل الكتاب لا رب فيه من رب} العالمين "This Quran could not have been fabricated by anyone other than Allah. It verifies what preceded it and details the scripture, unquestionably from the Lord of the Worlds."} (Yunus:37)

In the Quran, there's a vivid unfolding of the tales of past nations, painted against a rich historical backdrop. Take the Jewish people, for instance, renowned for their elaborate and dense literary interpretations surrounding their divine texts. They are the custodians of the Talmud, a labyrinth of ceaseless commentaries that, over time, have nudged the Torah from its central place of reverence. Despite being endowed with the most meticulous details (احسن تفصيلاً لكل شيء) by the divine, they found God's book lacking. They erected an impenetrable forest of interpretations around it, turning it into something almost unrecognizable. This wasn't just a divergence; it was a departure. Lost in their own elaborations, they strayed far from the intended path of divine guidance, wandering off after human conjectures despite their profound religious commitments. Their relentless pursuit of external sources of revelation, despite having a "detailed book" at their disposal, led them hopelessly astray. The Quran points to this behavior in its critique: {
وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أَنْ يَفْتَرِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقُ الَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدِيهِ وَتَفْصِيلُ الْكِتَابِ لَا رِبٌّ فِيْهِ مِنْ رَبٍّ
كان هذا القرآن أن يفتري من دون الله ولكن تصدق الذي بين يديه وتفصيل الكتاب لا رب فيه من رب} العالمين "This Quran could not have been fabricated by anyone other than Allah. It verifies what preceded it and details the scripture, unquestionably from the Lord of the Worlds."} (Yunus:37) The Quran keeps revisiting the theme of the 'detailed book' given to earlier nations, almost as if it's nudging the Muslim community, again and again, reminding them that they too have been graced with a scripture rich in detail. It's like a warning flare shot into the dark, urging them not to fall

into the same trap as the Jews, who once found their divine text lacking, hungry for more, despite its clarity and completeness. The Quran is determined to steer Muslims away from a future where Islamic scholars might build walls of esoteric interpretations and dense historical texts around divine revelation, mirroring the complex layers added by the Rabbis and Pharisees.

The Quran sharply critiques how past communities strayed into religious deviations, shining a light on a truth that feels almost too intimate: these deviations spring from the very heart of corrupted religious thinking. The rabbis and monks didn't just elevate themselves to god-like statuses or legislative powerhouses overnight. No, they did it by weaving history and interpretation into the sacred fabric of religion, making these elements as crucial as divine text itself. Imagine history elbowing its way past revelation, claiming a higher throne. This shift didn't just happen; it was crafted meticulously by those supposed to guide faith. When Jewish rabbis started sidelining the explicit directives of the Torah, fishing out rules from the murky waters of elder sayings, they were doing more than misinterpreting texts—they were sanctifying history, elevating it to the status of revelation. The Quran doesn't just mention this; it calls it out as a notorious deviation, a classic misstep of past nations that we're nudged to remember and avoid.¹

History, often a silent saboteur of faith, has wreaked more havoc on religion than any vocal critic or outright adversary ever could. It weaves a dense veil around the essence of revelation, sometimes sanctifying itself so audaciously that it dares to attack from within. While it cloaks the divine in obscurity, those who actively defy revelation find themselves pushed to the margins of history. These dissenters, regardless of their once pivotal roles, become relics in a historical morgue, frozen and discarded in the annals of time's trash.

Yet, the real treachery lies in a sanctified history that turns inward, setting up barricades of interpretation so thick that they don't just

obscure revelation—they pause its pulse. This isn't an outright stop, but a slow, insidious suspension of its vital functions. In a twist of irony, today's Muslims might find themselves venerating the Quran as a mere talisman, a book of blessings rather than the guiding compass it is meant to be. This shift isn't just a cultural drift but a deliberate manipulation by a history that has turned against its own divine narrative, proving once again that the most profound battles are fought not at the borders but within the walls of our own fortifications.

For most people, the concept of a Prophet is a dizzying paradox, not easily grasped without a vigilant, divine guiding hand. Believing that someone, who walks and talks like us, could be a conduit for the divine, is like embarking on a perilously narrow mental tightrope—finer than a strand of hair and sharper than a sword's edge. The line between acknowledging and denying a Prophet is razor-thin, capable of splitting communities into entirely separate factions. A Prophet is neither just a mortal nor purely celestial; those who view him solely in human terms often reject his message, while those who ascribe to him divine attributes might inadvertently distort his true mission, transforming reverence into excess. This tension, this fraught balancing act between reverence and reality, challenges us to navigate a path strewn with potential missteps, where understanding can either illuminate or completely obscure the truth. Navigating the razor's edge between disbelief and idolatry when it comes to recognizing a Prophet is an intensely fragile endeavor—one that human societies seldom manage to sustain for long. A figure who converses with the divine, who acts as a bridge between the celestial and the terrestrial, is inevitably enshrined in a narrative of sanctity as time unfolds. That such a person's story might evolve into a revered saga shouldn't come as a shock. This delicate balance is a precarious dance on the tightrope of spiritual consciousness, where every step could either stabilize or shatter the understanding of divinity intertwined with humanity.

History has a mesmerizing pull, especially when it wraps around a figure like the Prophet, a conduit for divine revelation, bridging the cosmic and the earthly. For believers, to reduce such a profound narrative to mere facts or to only skim its surface is not just impractical—it's deeply unsatisfying, both emotionally and intellectually. The Quran paints a vivid portrait of {Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, and those with him} (Al-Fath: 29), highlighting that this is no ordinary tale. It's an epic of individuals endowed with unwavering resolve, celestial dignity, and holy traits—a blueprint for future epochs. Yet, there's a crucial line to draw: admiring this narrative, using the historical figure who received the revelation as a role model, is one thing; sanctifying the historical record itself is quite another. We must remember that human interpretations and historical records are not on par with divine insight and the script of revelation. Past civilizations have stumbled over this very hurdle. In chronicling their prophets, they didn't just lean on the divine narratives that were meant to guide them. Instead, they lifted their human accounts to a pedestal of eternity and sanctity, blurring the lines between human history and divine revelation, mistaking the former for the latter. This error—a classic human overreach—turned their historical texts into something they were never meant to be: equivalents of the divine word.

The Jewish people not only turned Moses's historical narrative into a sacred saga but also placed it on the same pedestal as the Torah's written commandments. They wove a belief that the essence of these scriptures could only be unlocked through oral traditions. This perspective didn't just put history on a par with divine revelation; it elevated it, making it the premier interpreter of sacred texts.

Jesus stepped into this rigid and decayed religious landscape primarily to shepherd the lost tribes of Israel back to spiritual authenticity. He sharply critiqued the Pharisees and Rabbis, who had petrified Jewish law into something cold and devoid of spirit. By

condemning them for straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel, he underscored their obsession with minor legalities while they completely overlooked the profound moral foundations of the Torah, effectively sidelining its true essence.

Initially, Jesus's teachings sent shockwaves through the stale, corrupt corridors of Jewish religious thought. But as time unfurled, his message morphed under the hands of his followers, tailored now to fit broader evangelistic and political ambitions. It resonated with a new vigor, reaching beyond the Jewish community to touch a global audience. As his persona evolved from a regional prophet into a universal messenger, his disciples, scattered far from the historical moorings of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, found themselves driven to underscore not just his teachings but also the historical and geographical anchors of his life in their missionary zeal. These efforts didn't just spread his word; they transformed it, turning Jesus into a figurehead of an ever-expanding faith narrative. Christ's teachings, dripping with divine revelation, became so enmeshed with the narratives of his life that pulling them apart was not just difficult—it was unthinkable. Instead, a new belief crystallized: Christ's very being was an embodiment of revelation. Every gesture, every word, every moment he walked the earth was not just an action but a profound divine message, a piece of wisdom unfurling, a sermon in motion.

The Jewish people hold a profound bond with history, viewing themselves not just as participants but as chosen custodians in God's grand narrative. Entrusted with the Torah when others shied away, they embraced a role that others deemed too daunting. This isn't just about keeping records; it's about elevating their history to something sacred, wrapping it in layers of reverence and sanctity. They don't just preserve their past; they anoint it, turning the pages of their history books into almost holy scripture, a testament not only to their past but to their divine appointment.

It's startling, really, how Jesus, who fiercely critiqued the entrenched historical doctrines and the man-made religious codes crafted by the Rabbis, inadvertently inspired his followers to elevate history to the heights of divine revelation after he left the scene. They didn't stop there—they sanctified history itself, morphing it into a form of divine discourse. Although the Apostles might not have penned their Gospels with this haloed historical intent, the end result has been transformative: these texts are now revered not merely as chronicles of divine acts but as slices of revelation themselves, or at the very least, as potent and authoritative declarations of divine truth. Such is the irony—critiqued by the master, yet enshrined by those who came after.

In this historical fabric, if the accounts of Prophet Muhammad's life are sanctified in the same manner, or if his followers begin to regard his sayings and actions as a form of non-recited revelation, akin to those revered by followers of earlier prophets, we are indeed seeing a reenactment of the same misguided reverence. It's a captivating yet flawed narrative cycle where echoes from the past blend too seamlessly with the present, transforming lived experiences into sacred texts. This transcends mere respect for a revered figure; it involves elevating historical accounts to a stature that might even exceed the explicitly revealed scripture, treating his attributed words as divine messages themselves.

The moments and surroundings that framed Prophet Muhammad are steeped in immense significance. Unlike Moses, Jesus, or other prophets who were anchored to specific times and places, Muhammad's mission transcends these boundaries—it spans 'all worlds' and is meant to echo until the very end of time. A prophet heralded as 'كافة للناس'—universal for all people—whose roles as both 'بشير' (herald) and 'نذير' (warner) are destined to resonate until the end of time, should not be confined by mere historical contexts. If this figure is diminished to just another character in the annals of history, or if his teachings are viewed

merely as reflections of the cultural environment that shaped him, then it is entirely reasonable to challenge whether his mission truly transcends historical limitations. It's undeniable: whether we enshrine the life and times of the Prophet as sacred history or just catalogue them as mere historical facts, and whether we idolize them as a model to emulate or scrutinize them as a precedent, the reality remains—we can't actually step back into the Prophet's days. Whether we elevate those moments to the level of revelation or demote them to mere episodes of the past, the most we can ever do, both emotionally and intellectually, is to sift through the historical narrative, sieving out the facts, and then passionately imprint our own beliefs onto what remains. For those who envision Prophet Muhammad not simply as a figure anchored in the sands of his time but as a timeless beacon for now and tomorrow, it's essential to bypass the dusty corridors of human-constructed history and dive straight into the vivid, divine disclosures of the Quran. Here, the Prophet's life and deeds are not mere entries in an ancient ledger but are vibrant sparks scattered across the pages—each a burst of authentic history that does more than recount the past; they cast a luminous path forward, hinting at a future filled with deeper meaning than any fossilized fact could offer.

For followers of Christ, the path is set: they must dig through the sands of history to unearth glimpses of divine revelation. However, for us, the essence of Muhammad's life and actions is vividly embedded within the divine revelation itself. The contrast between these approaches is stark: one is a human quest, sifting through the annals of time in hopes of capturing fleeting divine insights; the other is a direct revelation, where the historical events of Muhammad's life are not just recounted but illuminated and validated, offering us not just stories, but a celestial map, etched with indelible truths. For believers, grasping the historical events and the creative vision that shapes their interpretation is essential because the Prophet's life, illuminated by divine revelation, is

our guiding light in every facet of existence. However, attempting to emulate this exemplar through the lens of human-validated history rather than the authenticated sources of revelation is fundamentally misplaced. This caution stems not just from the inherent perils of historical reconstruction—where every attempt to recapture the past is laced with the risks of misinterpretation—but also from recognizing the profound depth of the Prophet's days. Given their immense significance, we can say with certainty that no historical method or narrative possesses the depth to fully reveal the Prophet's life in its complete intricacy to our hearts and minds. We must remember that history, at its core, remains just that—history. It does not hold the sanctity or authority of authenticated revelation. It is a narrative pieced together by fallible human hands, never reaching the divine clarity and truth that revelation provides. Indeed, the scope of historical writing simply isn't expansive enough to capture the full spectrum of the Prophet's 23 years, where each moment is dense with significance that stretches across epochs, complete with every intricate detail and nuanced context. Even the thickest tomes of history and biographies manage only to sketch a handful of significant events. But who gets to decide which moments were monumental and which were mere footnotes in those groundbreaking 23 years? It's a subjective selection, a historian's dilemma, where the profound entirety of a prophet's life is condensed into what's deemed noteworthy by fallible human judgment.

Trying to reconstruct history through history itself often gives us nothing more than a blurry, incomplete snapshot of the Prophet's life. So, what choice do we have but to turn to the Quran? It's not just a book; it's a vivid, living canvas where every day of Prophet Muhammad is portrayed in full color, dimension, and detail. It's where we find not only his life's profound narrative but also the echo of ancient prophets and past revelations woven seamlessly into its verses. The Quran doesn't just recount history; it breathes life into it, making every word

and every moment shimmer with clarity and truth. With the Quran as a steadfast and authentic guide, leaning too heavily on human history threatens to shadow the transcendent essence of the Prophet's persona. This divine manuscript, unaltered and timeless, coupled with the universal and eternal relevance of Prophet Muhammad's mission, implores us to perceive his life and actions not merely as chronological events but as layers of profound meaning. We are urged to look beyond the mere facts, to embrace a perspective that transcends time and space, echoing how past prophets should be seen—not just within the confines of history, but as figures extending beyond it, etched deeply into the fabric of eternity. We can only truly grasp the essence of Medina, the City of the Prophet, when we see it not just as a backdrop in time but as a living archetype of History itself. If we fail to elevate our perspective, our attempts to follow the Prophet's example might devolve into mere historical exercises—dry, scholarly pursuits that lean on shaky historical sources for legitimacy, much like the flawed endeavors of past communities. We need to transcend the mundane, to see Medina not as a static relic of the past, but as *Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah*—the city of enlightenment, a vibrant, enduring symbol that continually reshapes our understanding of what it means to follow a prophet.

In response to past communities who mistakenly lifted historical narratives to the heights of divine revelation, the first generation of Muslims approached history with a critical eye. They understood all too well how a deep emotional connection to the prophets' lives could distort beliefs, leading to significant doctrinal missteps across different nations. Their caution was not just prudent; it was a necessary shield against the historical embellishments that had veered so many off the path of true faith. The first generation of Muslims was acutely aware of how the Jewish tradition claimed that Moses received not just the written Torah on Mount Sinai, but also oral revelations, whispered from one generation of Jewish prophets, scholars, and elders to the

next. This belief spun out into texts like the Mishnah and Gemara, which purported to contain and interpret these oral truths, claiming this was the only authentic way to understand the Torah. This approach essentially locked away the original texts, relegating them to mere symbols rather than living guides, while the Talmud became the go-to manual for daily life. This layering of interpretation upon interpretation not only twisted the original divine messages but fossilized the entire fabric of religious thought. The Quran, with its sharp critique of this rigidity and deviation, profoundly shaped the cautious stance of the first generation of Muslims, warning them about the dangers of letting human interpretations overshadow divine revelations. To stave off any doctrinal drift within their faith, the senior companions and the Rightly Guided Caliphs were profoundly vigilant, almost to a fault. Their efforts have largely paid off, as today, it's incredibly challenging to pinpoint any sayings of the Prophet that can be confidently authenticated or declared continuously transmitted, transcending mere historical documentation. Indeed, there isn't a single hadith in the vast repository that captures the Prophet Muhammad's words perfectly in their original context—time, place, and environment intact. This diligence of the first generation of Muslims is nothing short of remarkable; deeply devoted to the Prophet, they nonetheless foresaw the potential for future intellectual straying and decisively shut down any pathway that might lead to a Mishnah or Gemara-like evolution in Islam.

It seems almost paradoxical that those who surrendered their entire beings to the mission of Prophet Muhammad, who saw his presence as a pivotal moment in history, and who felt that with his death the bond between earth and heaven was irreversibly broken, could prevent his personal history from overshadowing the divine revelations. Despite their profound love for the Prophet, this devoted group managed to keep his earthly actions from eclipsing the celestial messages. In truth, it was Prophet Muhammad himself who cultivated this non-sacred view

of history. He was meticulously careful with the arrangement of the Quranic revelations, dedicated to preserving and spreading the revelations both in written and oral forms. He emphatically declared, "Do not write anything from me except the Quran; whoever has written anything other than the Quran should erase it" (reported by Muslim), setting a stark boundary to focus solely on the divine word, ensuring his own words and deeds didn't morph into sacred scripture.

The teachings of Prophet Muhammad resonated so deeply that his closest companions, especially Caliph Umar, would often proclaim with conviction, "²—حسبنا كتاب الله—The book of Allah is sufficient for us."

Despite their profound emotional bond, it was nearly impossible for them to disregard his sayings and deeds entirely. In a particularly striking move, Abu Bakr Siddiq, one of the Prophet's earliest and closest companions, amassed a collection of about five hundred hadiths. This could have stood as the definitive anthology of the Prophet's teachings, an unparalleled resource. Yet, Abu Bakr, deeply cautious of the future, foresaw the risk of this collection morphing into something akin to the Mishnah in Judaism—a rigid codification that might constrain the fluid essence of Islam. With a heavy heart and profound foresight, he chose to destroy the collection, a painful but pivotal decision aimed at preserving the purity of Islamic teachings.

The early Muslims regarded history with a pragmatic eye, seeing it merely as a sequence of past events. Abu Bakr, after meticulous consideration, worried that his collection might harbor statements of the Prophet that were not captured accurately, misinterpreted by listeners, or whose deeper meanings were lost without the nuances of context. This vigilant scrutiny drove him to a radical decision—destroying what might have been the most significant compendium of the Prophet's teachings. He preferred to obliterate these documents rather than risk the sanctity of the Prophet's words being compromised by human error or misreading.

In the nascent days of Islam, the Quran flourished—widely distributed, memorized en masse, established in the form of the official *Mushaf*, and readily available in tangible, written formats. This ubiquity made it nearly impossible to imagine that Abu Bakr's collection of *Hadiths* could ever rival the Quran as a secondary revelation. Yet, Abu Bakr, with his profound sense of historical responsibility, was haunted by the possibility. He couldn't bear the thought that, someday, his collection might be seen as an authoritative source for decoding Islamic teachings. Abu Bakr, voicing his deep-seated worries, mused, "What if parts of this collection were never actually spoken by the Prophet, or were grossly misunderstood?" As he stood on the precipice of deciding to destroy this immense treasury of knowledge, his grasp of history wasn't just a backdrop; it was his compass. He understood that, despite its vast scholarly and interpretive potential, the faith would remain whole without this compilation. Echoing through history, as al-Dhahabi recounts, Abu Bakr sternly cautioned the crowd not to spread purported sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, instilling a cautious reverence for the sanctity and accuracy of his words.

Abu Bakr wasn't alone in his crusade to preserve the Islamic narrative. Caliph Umar, too, took a stand against the formal recording of traditions. Initially, Umar toyed with the idea of compiling the Prophet's sayings and actions, but he soon echoed Abu Bakr's fears: that creating such collections might open the floodgates to the same doctrinal distortions that had ensnared earlier communities. He sensed that any compilation of the Prophet's sayings might quickly ascend to the status of a sacred text. If these traditions started to be perceived as divine or on par with divine revelation, the fundamental, central, and ultimate authority of the Quran would be jeopardized.

Caliph Umar, far more versed in Jewish religious texts than many of his contemporaries, was resolute in his determination to prevent the emergence of a new *Mishnah* within Islam. He famously stated, 'اَنِّي كُفَّتْ'

اردت أن أكتب السنن وأني ذكرت قوما كانوا قبلكم كتبوا كتاباً فأكبوا عليها وتركوا كتاب الله واني والله
 ٰلابس كتاب الله شئي "I wanted to write down the traditions, but then I remembered a people before you who wrote a book, devoted themselves to it, and abandoned the Book of Allah. By Allah, I will not let anything compete with the Book of Allah." Umar not only shelved the idea of officially compiling the Prophet's sayings but also sternly warned other narrators to tread with extreme caution. Some historians even recount that when Umar discovered people had begun writing down hadiths, he had them all gathered and burned.³

Had Abu Bakr's collection of hadiths, or a compilation during Caliph Umar's reign with the guidance of senior companions, come to fruition, it would have held unparalleled authority due to its temporal closeness to the Prophet. Compiled under the caliphate's vigilant eye, it would have stood as a unanimously accepted document within the Muslim community. This dual endorsement could have given it immense historical credibility, but also dangerously edged it towards being seen as a secondary revelation. It's through such historical loopholes that previous communities stumbled into the realms of the Mishnah and Gemara. Sensing this peril, Caliph Umar adopted a fiercely stringent stance on hadith compilation.

For the companions of the Prophet, reminiscing about the days spent with him, reliving their gatherings, and recalling those precious moments when the Messenger of God was among them, must have been the most joyous experience. But the necessity of safeguarding the integrity of the faith by sealing off the hidden doors of history was even more pressing. Thus, the Caliph took a firm stance against the excessive narration of hadiths. Umar had such a clear understanding of the difference between history and divine revelation that he explicitly instructed Qarza bin Ka'b, when sending him to Iraq, not to let people become so engrossed in hadiths that they neglected the Quran.⁴ Qarza later recounted that from that day on, he never narrated another hadith.

There's a story that once, upon seeing Ubay bin Ka'b narrating hadiths, Umar picked up a stick, ready to reprimand him.⁵ Historical records tell us that even notable companions like Abdullah bin Mas'ud, Abu Darda, and Abu Dharr weren't spared from Umar's strict prohibition against narrating hadiths.⁶ Some accounts go so far as to say that Umar imprisoned Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Darda, and Abu Mas'ud Ansari because they were too prolific in their hadith narrations.⁷

In the Medina of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, a steadfast tradition of returning to the Quran was brilliantly established. Under the direct guidance of Prophet Muhammad, the companions developed a historical consciousness that made the emergence of a new Mishnah nearly impossible. Nevertheless, the Caliphs maintained an unwaveringly cautious stance on hadith compilation. They were resolute in their refusal to create any document outside of the Quran that detailed the Prophet's sayings and actions in a manner that might be sanctified and lead to interpretive literature similar to the Mishnah.

It's a bit of an oddity, but imagine this: Muhammad, son of Ali, once tried handing over two pages of what he claimed were zakat laws from the Prophet to Caliph Uthman, who gently refused them with a "Please, spare me this..."⁸ The Prophet's companions only saw history as just that—history. They resisted elevating it to anything grander, firmly believing that true interpretations should stem directly from divine revelation, the perpetual and authentic source of the Prophet's teachings. This perspective became their legacy. As these venerable companions departed from this world one by one, none dared to leave behind a definitive collection of the Prophet's words and deeds.⁹

In the nascent days of Islam, the distinction between history and divine revelation was so sharply drawn in the minds of the first Muslims that merely the attribution to the Prophet did not suffice for acceptance. Take, for example, when Mahmoud Ansari quoted a hadith proclaiming that saying 'There is no god but Allah' could essentially

blacklist you from Hell—a kind of spiritual get-out-of-jail-free card. Ayub Ansari instantly rebutted, his skepticism thick in the air, "By Allah, I cannot fathom the Prophet ever uttering such a thing."¹⁰ Likewise, when Fatimah bint Qais declared that a woman irrevocably divorced isn't owed maintenance or housing by her ex-husband, Caliph Umar balked. He couldn't align her claims with the Quran. It was unthinkable for him to accept a narration from a woman that contradicted the sacred text—what if her memory was flawed? In his eyes, the word of the Quran was absolute, and any deviation, especially based on potentially faulty human recollection, was outright inadmissible.

Aisha's pointed critiques and her sometimes corrective remarks about how the senior companions narrated and interpreted the Prophet's sayings illustrate more than just a widow's fidelity to her husband's memory. They reveal a generation of Muslims profoundly in tune with the need for rigorous scrutiny of historical accounts. This wasn't merely about preserving facts; it was about safeguarding the sanctity of the Prophet's teachings amid a period deemed immensely significant. Her sharp eye and the vigilant approach of her peers underscored a broader commitment to truth that transcended personal reverence. In an account from Sahih Muslim, Abdullah Ibn Abbas, while recounting a decision attributed to Ali, strategically omitted words, punctuating his narrative with a resolute declaration, "By Allah, Ali would never have made such a decision." Abu Hurairah's hadith, which states that touching anything warmed by fire undoes ablution, found no favor with Aisha. She was equally skeptical of Ibn Umar's assertion that the dead can hear—his anecdote from the Battle of Badr did not resonate with her understanding. With a mix of disbelief and prayer for mercy on Ibn Umar, she countered with a stark Quranic verse: "Indeed, you cannot make the dead hear, nor can you make those in the graves listen" (Fatir: 22). Aisha swiftly rejected the notion,

narrated in a hadith, that the dead suffer due to their families' mourning. She firmly supported her rejection by referencing the Quranic verse, "لَا تَنْزَرُ وَازْدَرُ وَزَرْ أَخْرَى" ("No bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another"). Similarly, when embellished accounts claiming visions of God, supposedly uttered by the Prophet, started circulating, she decisively dismissed them with the verse, "لَا يَدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ" ("No vision can grasp Him..."), underscoring her commitment to rooting out exaggerations that strayed from the Quran's clear words.

The companions were acutely aware that the final revelation, the blueprint for the future, was already sealed between the sacred covers (لوح محفوظ) in a definitive book form. They recognized that while history holds its own allure, it is, at its core, merely history—fraught with its own biases and not a definitive guide to interpreting the ultimate revelations contained in the Quran. The weight of this reality caused them to approach the recounting of the Prophet Muhammad's days and words with profound caution. It's told that when Abdur Rahman bin Abi Layla urged Zaid bin Arqam to share a hadith, Zaid confessed, "We have aged and forgotten much, and to speak the Prophet's words is no light task—it's laden with the gravity of getting it unequivocally right." Those who dared to utter sayings or spin interpretations linked to the Prophet Muhammad often found themselves weighed down by the heavy cloak of historical responsibility. Take Zaid ibn Thabit, for example: he once shared a hadith on the behest of Caliph Muawiya. But when he saw the intent to ink it permanently into the annals, he swiftly erased it, pressing the point that the Prophet himself had barred his teachings from being penned.¹¹ In a similar vein, when Abu Sa'id al-Khudri's disciples begged to write down his narratives, he snapped back with a fervor, demanding they hold these narratives in their minds, not on paper, fiercely reminding them that the sayings of the Prophet were not to morph into a Quranic sequel. And Abu Hurairah? He was cut from the same cloth, walking that thin line between reverence and

overreach, preserving the oral tradition with a tenacious grip on the Prophet's original command.¹²

The early Muslims were deeply aware of the delicate dance of recounting the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and actions orally. They knew the perils of human memory—that errors whispered from one ear to another could fade into oblivion, which was natural, even forgivable. But to lock those mistakes in ink? That was another story. They treated the Prophet's words with a fierce precision, cautious to the bone about setting them down on paper, worried that a written record might freeze any misstep into an eternal echo. So they tiptoed around the sacred, ensuring no slip of the tongue turned into a permanent scar on the fabric of their faith.¹³

When History Clashes with Revelation The Battle for Truth

As long as the Muslim community remained a cohesive unit, the line between history and revelation was sharply defined in the collective consciousness. But, the assassination of Caliph Uthman ignited a fierce political inferno that scorched through the Caliphate, scrambling the unity of Islam into a fight for mere survival. Amid this chaos, maintaining the nuanced dance between history and revelation became an ideological high-wire act too perilous to perform.

This faltering wasn't just about failing to reject history outright—no, it was subtler than that. Muslims didn't just store history away; they interacted with it, albeit draped in layers of caution. Narrations of hadiths were permitted, yes, but always with a wary eye, ensuring they didn't overshadow the Quran or elevate themselves to a status that rivaled the divine text.

To keep history in its lane, robust systems were put in place: narrations were rationed, strict adherence to the Prophet's directive against documenting hadiths was enforced, a profound sense of duty pervaded the transmission of the Prophet's words, and the caliphate kept a vigilant watch. Yet, as the political storms battered the caliphate, the vigilant guardianship waned, loosening the reins on historical narratives. History, no longer tightly leashed, began to creep into realms of sanctification and relied on narratives that lacked solid historical grounding, blurring lines that once were clear.

Abdullah ibn Zubayr pointed out an unsettling trend in the narration of a hadith famously attributed to the Prophet Muhammad:

"من كذب على فليتبأ مقعده من النار" (Whoever lies about me should prepare his seat in Hell).¹⁴ He noticed that the word "مِتَعْمِدًا" (intentionally) had been sneakily inserted into the narrative, a word he confirmed never crossed the Prophet's lips. This instance mirrors a broader shift in the Muslim community's approach to history—a subtle drift from stark accuracy towards a more lenient interpretation.

The leniency became a gateway for those who saw every wise word as possibly originating from the Prophet. It granted license to that simplicity, where the words "مِتَعْمِدًا" (intentionally) could wrap errors in narrations, misunderstandings, or misinterpretations with a veneer of legitimacy. The word "مِتَعْمِدًا" (intentionally) wove a layer of leeway into the narrative fabric, birthing the notion that any piece of wisdom could be ascribed to the Prophet Muhammad if it sounded profound enough.¹⁵ This twist in the historical tale gave the more guileless preachers a sort of narrative carte blanche, liberating them from the dense web of scholarly rigor.

With the door now ajar for the imaginative recreation of hadiths through historical narrative, elevating history to a sacred level became surprisingly easy. This lax attitude towards history among Muslims had a cocktail of root causes. First, the internal chaos within the Caliphate, a political storm that left no corner untouched. Second, the lingering influence of former People of the Book, whose historical perspectives seeped into Muslim consciousness. Third, the relentless tug-of-war of political factions. Fourth, the well-intentioned but hopelessly naive preachers. And finally, the former hypocrites—now heretics—who were determined to blur the lines, turning history into divine revelation. This convergence of forces reshaped how history was perceived, creating a narrative landscape where sanctity and historical fact often collided.

The political chaos flung open the doors to rampant factionalism. Supporters of Ali and Uthman alike started leaning on fabricated hadiths to shore up their stances. As time marched on, the Umayyads

and Abbasids seized these narrations to anchor their political ambitions. This maelstrom of conflict created the perfect stage for scholars and storytellers from the People of the Book to push their historical perspectives into the Muslim mainstream. Picture Abu Hurairah in the gatherings of Ka'b al-Ahbar, Muslim intrigue piqued by Ka'b al-Ahbar's prior knowledge, and the free rein given to the narratives of Tamim al-Dari and Ka'b al-Ahbar. This set the stage for a version of history that danced to the tune of Jewish historical concepts, reshaping how events and traditions were interpreted and understood.¹⁶

In the throes of this chaos, those "former" hypocrites found their moment. Once concealed by the watchful eye of a vigilant caliph and his robust system, they now had free rein to manipulate history and its interpretation. The Quran had already unmasked them in stark terms: (وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْمُّبَيِّنَاتِ مَرْدُوا عَلَى النِّفَاقِ لَا تَعْلَمُهُمْ) (التوبه: 101), "And among the people of Medina are those who persist in hypocrisy; you do not know them..." This verse laid bare their deceit, but in the ensuing turmoil, they seized the opportunity to twist historical narratives to their advantage, weaving their subterfuge into the fabric of Muslim history.

In these pages, we aren't setting out to craft a meticulous chronology of hadith; instead, we're diving into the intellectual shifts that have unfolded due to evolving interpretations of our Quranic view of history. This discussion is tailored to unpack the dynamics that have positioned history and traditions on a pedestal, often endowed with a sanctity they don't inherently possess. Moreover, we're probing into why our narrative is starting to echo the People of the Book, where history becomes a sanctioned interpreter of revelation. We're here to dissect the roots of this slippery slope, to understand how historical reverence might be distorting our foundational texts, and to question the very basis of this historical enchantment—why, exactly, have we begun to see the past as a lens through which to view divine intent?

The earliest Muslims drew sharp lines in the sand, intent on staving off any rise of a Mishnah-like tradition that could warp their pure faith. Yet, as time marched on, these rigorous boundaries blurred, uncertainties crept in, challenging the once-clear demarcations. Central to this shift was the burgeoning belief that historical accounts could serve as a veritable spring of the Prophet's Sunnah, or that Sunnah itself was nothing more than a repository of the Prophet's sayings and deeds not captured within the Quran's verses.

This pivotal drift in perception begs deeper probing: What catalyzed this shift? More poignantly, how did the understanding evolve to equate the Prophet's lived example (*Uswah*) with Sunnah, pushing the faithful to seek divine guidance primarily through anthologies of his spoken words and actions? Moreover, it's imperative to trace the historical moment when Sunnah began to be seen not just as a way of life but as synonymous with the hadith—a transformation significant in its implications and monumental in its reach. The path from *Uswah* to Sunnah, and from Sunnah to Hadith, marks a seismic shift in how we perceive history—a shift that demands our understanding if we're to truly grasp the Prophet Muhammad's authentic example and pinpoint the roots of his teachings. Just as it's nearly impossible for us to advance even a step without the Prophet's model, any error in tracing the sources of *Uswah* risks severing our ties to what we deem the most authentic manifestation of the final revelation.

Navigating between the realms of revelation and history in pursuit of the Prophet's true example might seem simple on the surface, given the unquestioned superiority of revelation. But the waters get murky when history is pulled in as a supplementary or interpretive aid. History isn't something we can outright dismiss, nor is embracing its interpretive promises free of peril. Rather than a full rejection, the earliest Muslims opted for restraint, keeping history on a tight leash. This was no arbitrary choice—it was a strategic maneuver essential for

maintaining the delicate equilibrium between divine revelation and the human record of the past. Without this critical balance, untangling the knotted misconceptions that have entangled the true understanding of the Prophet's example becomes a near impossible feat—a challenge fraught with the risk of losing sight of the spiritual compass that should guide us.

3

Uswah Between Revelation and History

If we could have kept history neatly contained within its designated borders, then surely the Quran would reign supreme as the most credible, authentic, and everlasting guide in our quest to trace the Prophet's Uswah—his example. But history, ever a crafty storyteller, began to expand, overstepping its boundaries, aided by terms that seemed synonymous at first glance but subtly introduced new and foreign concepts into Islamic thought.

The idea of Sunnah as embodying the Prophet's Uswah wasn't originally part of the Quranic worldview during the Companions' era. The Quran, with its clear-cut pronouncements, firmly anchors the importance of following the Prophet's example, equating obedience to him with obedience to Allah: "Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allah..." (An-Nisa: 80). The Prophet was more than just a spiritual leader; he was a practical model whose life and conduct were direct manifestations of divine revelation: "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have a good example..." (Al-Ahzab: 21). His role was unambiguously authoritative for the believers, underscored by commands like: "Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, refrain from..." (Al-Hashr: 7) and "If you dispute in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and the Messenger..." (An-Nisa: 59). This framework makes it clear: to walk in God's grace, one must walk in the footsteps of the Prophet. Those who resist acknowledging the Prophet's decisive role across the spectrum of life essentially betray a faith not yet fully formed within their hearts.

The Quran articulates this clearly: "But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves" (An-Nisa: 65) and "The Bedouins say, 'We have believed.' Say, 'You have not [yet] believed; but say [instead], 'We have submitted,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts..." (Al-Hujurat: 14). From the inception of Islamic thought, the Prophet Muhammad was understood as the linchpin of a believer's life—his actions and words forming the core of divine obedience. Yet, the notion that the Uswah—the Prophet's lived example—was synonymous with the Sunnah, documented through hadiths, was not a concept that held water in the earliest days.

For students of the Quran, the term "Sunnah" related to the Prophet's customs is notably absent from the text. Instead, the Quran discusses "Sunnat Allah" (the divine order), "Sunnat Ibrahim" (the Way of Abraham), and the traditions of ancient civilizations, where "Sunnah" implies traditional practices rather than a strict religious doctrine. This subtle linguistic shift that equates Uswah (the Prophet's living example) with Sunnah has led to precarious interpretations. As the Quran recounts the ways of past peoples, it unintentionally sends believers on a quest through the historical wilderness, searching for what they deem the "Sunnah of the Prophet" in a sea of accumulated traditions.

Over time, the term "Sunnah" evolved to include not just the Prophet's practices but also his spoken words, actions, and tacit approvals, elevating it to a status nearly equivalent to the Quran. Some even distinguished between two types of revelations to the Prophet: the Quran, explicitly delivered through Gabriel, and a subtler, unspoken revelation directly impressed upon the Prophet's heart—silent yet profound divine guidance.¹⁷ In the Quran's framework, there's no distinction between 'recited' (Matlu) and 'non-recited' (Ghair Matlu) revelations. However, those who conflated Uswah with Sunnah, and Sunnah with Hadith, ventured deep into historical records in search of

tangible proofs of Sunnah. This conflation of terms has led to a dependency on history not just as a source but as a necessity, illustrating a fundamental misunderstanding of the interplay between divine guidance and historical records.

The invention of terms like "Matlu" (recited) and "Ghair Matlu" (non-recited), alongside notions of "jali" (manifest) and "khafi" (hidden) revelations, is akin to what the Quran decries as splitting the scripture into fragments (Al-Hijr: 91). These fresh terms infiltrated Islamic thought, undermining the absolute and final authority of the Quran. Under this revised paradigm, full comprehension of divine revelation required familiarity with both types of wisdom—recited and non-recited. This twist in the theological narrative fostered a bizarre dependency: understanding the Quran, or the recited words, was purportedly incomplete without grasping the silent, non-recited whispers of divine instruction. Imam Awza'i starkly captured this shift, asserting that "The Quran needs the Hadiths more than the Hadiths need the Quran,"¹⁸—a stark inversion of traditional Islamic scholarship that left the door ajar for interpretations riddled with human insertions, dressing them up as divine.

Imam Yahya ibn Kathir made a daring claim: "Hadith is the judge over the Quran, not the Quran over the Hadith."¹⁹ To shore up this audacious stance, proponents trotted out hadiths that insist, "إِنَّ الْحَدِيثَ لَا يُفَارِقُ الْقُرْآنَ" (Indeed, the hadith does not separate from the Quran),²⁰ arguing that untangling the meanings within the Quran is impossible without the clarifying lens of hadith. Those attuned to the historical threads binding the hadith exercised caution, offering the bare minimum on oral revelations, merely suggesting that "Hadiths are interpretations of the Quran".²¹ This careful phrasing bolstered the notion that peeling back the layers of Quranic insights is now overwhelmingly dependent on the unseen currents of non-recited revelations.

This reimagined concept of Sunnah, by aligning it closely with the Prophet's Uswah (example), yet seeking its traces in the historical records of his sayings and actions labeled as "non-recited revelations," mirrors the situation the Jews faced with the Torah. The broad interpretation of oral revelation granted Jewish scholars the freedom to mold the divine text, tethering the meanings of the Torah to the notions of their elders and historically unreliable references. This enabled them to steer the interpretation of the Torah along their preferred paths.

When the interpretation of divine revelation starts trailing behind human concoctions of history, it's essentially an act of nullification. Elevating manuscripts filled with the Prophet's sayings to the status of 'non-recited revelations,' and then branding these as the master keys to the Quran, echoes a crisis that has long entangled Jewish thought—a relentless cycle of interpretation that veers further from divine intent with every scholarly endeavor. This methodology, revered yet flawed, traps them in an interpretive loop, forever distancing them from the celestial blueprint. Even if, in a stroke of repentance, the Jews decide to abandon their historical interpretations, the Torah remains elusive, locked away beyond their corrective reach.

Today, a notable slice of Jewish scholars no longer view the Torah as a pristine, untampered revelation from God. In a world where written revelations bear the scars of time, it's not outlandish to think that human hands have shaped oral traditions too. In our own circles, the sanctity of the Quran has been persistently challenged by certain traditions, infiltrating even our most revered Hadith collections with claims of textual corruption. This isn't just a footnote; it's a narrative we need to dissect within the larger historical framework.

Modern Judaism has morphed largely into a narrative spun from the oral Torah—not the etched-in-stone kind, but a version weathered by human history, shaped more by human conjecture than by divine fiat.

In parallel, our own faith tradition wades through similar murky waters. In our search for Hadith or "wahi ghair matlu" (non-recited revelation), we've unearthed a kind of revelation so intertwined with history that it remains elusive, unconfirmed, and unauthenticated, even after centuries—suggesting that our deepest theological shifts may well be rooted not in celestial whispers, but in the echoes of human interpretation, stretched across the chasms of time.

The idea of a secondary revelation, riding alongside the Quran, is grounded on a contentious hadith²² that was unknown to the leading Companions and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. The phrase "أُوتِيتُ الْقُرآنَ وَمِنْهُ مَعَهُ..." (I was given the Quran and something like it along with it...) isn't just a blip in historical narratives; it's a doctrinal bombshell, laden with implications so profound that dismissing it as just another collection of sayings or actions simply won't do.

To even label this controversial hadith as just another historical entry risks rattling the core of Islam, painting a picture of a faith that has let significant chunks of its 'non-recited revelations' vanish into the annals of time. If the early Muslims had recognized any revelation beyond the Quran, hidden or otherwise, you bet there would have been major governmental or communal actions to safeguard it. Instead, the community found itself picking through a maze of mismatched and often clashing sources in search of this hidden wisdom. The moment history was considered a legitimate arena in the quest for Sunnah, these dubious hadiths played a critical role, deeply embedding this intellectual misstep.

The idea that there exists another form of revelation beyond the Quran has firmly embedded itself in the collective consciousness, now popularly known as the Hadith. As the discussion of the Prophet's Usrah (his living example) has diminished, the focus has shifted towards the extensive collections of Hadith. This shift has made it easier for people to embrace the notion, famously articulated by Abu Majlaz, that "إِنَّمَا حَدِيثَ النَّبِيِّ مُثْلُ الْقُرآنِ" ("the Hadith of the Prophet is like the

Quran"),²³ effectively placing the sayings of the Prophet on the same level as the divine scripture of the Quran.

As compilations of sayings attributed to the Prophet began to be revered as divine alongside the Quran, the Quranic concept of the Prophet's example (Uswah) gradually faded from scholarly focus. This perspective shift enabled scholars like Al-Qurtubi to interpret the phrase "فَقَدْ كَفَرُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ" ("Indeed, they disbelieve in what was revealed to Muhammad") as encompassing both the Quran and the Sunnah—الْكِتَابُ وَالسُّنْنَةُ—بِالْمِنْزَلِ الْكَوْنَاتِيِّ.²⁴ This interpretation paved the way for Islamic scholars to comfortably claim that the Sunnah, like the Quran, was divinely inspired. They held that the Sunnah also descended upon the Prophet through revelation, similar to the Quran, but with the distinction that it was not recited like the Quran—والسَّنَةُ إِيَّضًا تُنْزَلُ عَلَيْهِ بِالْوُحْيِ كَمَا يُنْزَلُ بِالْقُرْآنِ إِلَّا أُنْزَلَ²⁵ لَا تُنْزَلُ كَمَا يُتْلَى الْقُرْآنَ.²⁶ Some traditions push the idea further, suggesting that just as Gabriel brought the Quran down to the Prophet, the Sunnah, too, descended upon him in a similar divine dispatch.²⁷

Imam Shafi'i, a pivotal figure in Islamic jurisprudence, laid down a foundational framework that elevated Sunnah to the realm of divine revelation, distinct from the Quran yet inherently linked. He mapped out three distinct layers of Sunnah: first, the Prophet's commands that resonate and reaffirm the dictates of the Quran; second, his elucidations that clarify or detail the Quran's broader mandates; and third, his insights into areas where the Quran remains silent—this last type, Shafi'i argued, is what the Quran refers to as 'wisdom' (hikmah).²⁷ The frequent mentioning of 'al-kitab' (the Quran) with 'hikmah' (wisdom) has led some scholars down a captivating yet mistaken path—believing that revelation was bestowed in two distinct forms of divine guidance, each with its own unique realm in the celestial dispatches.

The confusion seeped in from a rather understandable place: there was this instinctive leap to believe that aside from the concrete revelations penned in the Quran, the very persona of the Prophet

Muhammad, radiating with divine wisdom, would naturally mirror this light in every word he spoke, every move he made. Indeed, the Prophet was nothing short of a beacon of this divine wisdom, which is precisely why Allah cast him as the ultimate exemplar—the Uswah Hasanah—for all believers. Yet, the leap to think that the quest for this *hikmah* could lean more on the annals of history than on the stark verses of the Quran was a misguided stride. Neither the divine text itself nor the companions' conception of history could sanction such a reliance on human narratives of traditions and actions when a decisive document like the Quran was in hand.

The march from wisdom to Sunnah, and Sunnah to the annals of history, was orchestrated under the banner of Imam Shafī'i, swayed by the hadith "مُنْتَهٰ مَعَهٰ" (I was given the Quran and something like it along with it...), a statement that deftly sketched the idea of dual revelations descending from the divine. I suspect Shafī'i was also nudged along by the social currents of his era—times that elevated the Prophet's narratives to a sacred pinnacle of scholarship and faith. It became a scholarly creed that the Quran, while perfectly preserved in its physical form, was only half of the treasure trove; the other half lay scattered in the ephemeral realm of the Prophet's words and deeds. This era declared a mission: to capture and codify these fleeting divine whispers into tangible records. If these narrations were ever lost, so too would be the rich depths of Quranic wisdom. This fear unleashed a wave of Hadith preservation, dissolving the old restraints that once checked the flood of narratives, allowing a deluge of traditions to sweep through Islamic scholarship, each one revered, repeated, and recorded.

Imam Shafī'i spun a narrative that caught fire amongst scholars—that the term "wisdom" (*Hikmah*) mentioned in the Quran is shorthand for the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. This insight isn't his alone; he's backed by the likes of Hasan, Qatadah, and Yahya bin Abu Kathir, all anchored deeply to the hadith, "أُوتِيتِ الْقُرْآنَ وَمُنْتَهٰ مَعَهٰ" (I was given the

Quran and something like it along with it...).²⁸ This piece of tradition has suggested a dual stream of divine wisdom, one penned down as the Quran and the other, a less tangible, equally divine wisdom, scattered through the Sunnah. Yet this hadith, the cornerstone of their argument, is riddled with scholarly skepticism and juridical contradictions, never having unified the jurists in consensus.²⁹ It was a topic of fierce debate by Shafi'i's time, but rewind further back to the era of the major Companions and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and this narrative evaporates—it was unknown, non-existent. If it had been otherwise, surely the rigorous governance of the Islamic Caliphate would have safeguarded this so-called second stream of revelation just as zealously as they did the Quran.

Imam Shafi'i was something of a trailblazer, the first to argue persuasively for allowing history to step out of its prescribed lane when dealing with Sunnah. He introduced the radical notion that when a prophetic saying surfaces, Muslims must be prepared to reevaluate their entrenched practices—even those as venerable as the Sunnah of the people of Medina. This isn't just a minor quibble; it's a pivotal principle that can't really be disputed. Yet, the authority to revise or cancel the ongoing Sunnah through the spoken Sunnah only really kicks in when the attribution to the Prophet is incontrovertibly clear. If not, we teeter dangerously close to elevating history above the Sunnah itself—a grave misstep. In this evolution from 'wisdom' known as Sunnah to 'history' dubbed Sunnah, what really happened was that we handed over the keys of religious interpretation to history, cloaking it under the guise of spoken Sunnah. Once the belief took root that these collections of sayings and actions were actually divine wisdom captured in writing, their stature was elevated far above mere historical accounts to that of revelation itself.

Imam Shafi'i breathed life into a period swirling with hadith narratives—a time when everyone seemed to aspire to the mantle of

hadith scholar, and the dark arts of hadith fabrication were rampant. This era posed a formidable intellectual labyrinth for scholars of the Sunnah. Amidst a deluge of dubious hadiths mingling with the genuine, even the brightest minds found themselves navigating a treacherous terrain, their brilliance shadowed by the overwhelming influx of fabricated sayings.

In the time of Imam Shafi'i, the concept had crystallized that revelation did not come to us in a singular form but rather, mysteriously, in twos. The scholars of Hadith, those guardians of the Prophet's sayings, found themselves elevated to a status almost as sacrosanct as the revelations they preserved. Knowledge in this epoch was synonymous with the knowledge of Hadith, a nod to the deep reverence and societal stature these scholars held. Their role was underpinned by a reluctance to transcribe Hadith, a nod to the Prophet's supposed command against it, which paradoxically solidified their authority as the living vessels of this oral tradition. By the time of Shafi'i, the notion of sayings and actions as channels of divine wisdom (*hikmah*) had become so entrenched that these words and deeds were confidently declared as the 'non-recited revelations', an open secret spoken of as if they were the quiet siblings of the Quran, hidden yet palpable.

Imam Shafi'i, delving into the verse (وَأَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ) {Al-Nisa: 113}, crafts a dualistic interpretation of divine guidance: the 'Book' as the recited Quran, and 'Wisdom' as the Sunnah, those divine inspirations not captured by recitation. He anchors this interpretation in the 'Story of Al-aseef,' where, according to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad executed a judgment on adultery—a judgment notably absent in the Quranic script.³⁰ Traditions assert that the Prophet claimed his ruling aligned with 'the book of Allah' or divine revelation. This historical lens doesn't just expand the search for wisdom beyond the Quran; it underscores a provocative idea. The act of stoning for adultery, historically enacted yet scripturally unrecorded, challenges the

notion that the Quran encapsulates the full breadth of divine will. It suggests a divine narrative partially untold within the Quran's verses, hinting at a broader, more elusive canvas of revelation. This notion—that Wisdom or *hikmah* meaning Sunnah,³¹ conceived as historical enactment, might question the completeness proclaimed by such verses as {اليوم أكملت لكم دينكم} (This day I have perfected for you your religion)—injects a complex layer of doubt and debate over the finality and sufficiency of the Quranic revelation itself.

Be it wisdom or the book, every flicker of the Prophet's guidance is the quintessence of divine revelation—the most immaculate reflection of Uswah. Yet, there's a seductive, perilous notion afloat: to seek this Uswah, this pulsating divine wisdom, in any script other than the revelation itself, or to entertain the idea of some covert revelation beyond the Quran, is to flirt dangerously with negating the very essence of revelation.³² The Quran, while elevating the Prophet Muhammad to a stature of monumental reverence, anchors him profoundly as a vessel whose entire enlightened wisdom—his Uswah—is indebted utterly to the scripture and divine wisdom granted from above.

The Prophet does not craft his own hallowed narrative, nor can sacred history serve as the bedrock for divine law. Echoed in the verse {قل إنما أنا بشر مثلكم يوحى إلي} (Al-Kahf: 110), it's clear that his utterances ring with truth, not because they spring from his whims, but because he is a mere conduit for the divine: {وما ينطق عن الهوى إن هو إلا وحي يوحى} (An-Najm: 3). He is charged with a celestial duty—to draw people to the scripture and wisdom {بلغ ما أنزل إليك} (Al-Ma'idah: 67). And should circumstances impede him—{أفان مات أو قتل انقلبتم على أعقابكم} (Aal-e-Imran: 144)—his mission remains unblemished, undeterred by the mortal coils that bind the rest of humanity.

The Prophet feels the weight of his mission, deeply aware that he stands as a beacon for his followers, his life a roadmap for the faithful. Yet, despite the grandeur of his role, he remains grounded in the reality

that he is merely the conduit of revelation, not its creator {أُوحى إلى هذا القرآن...لأنّكم به} (Al-An'am: 19). He is not the lawgiver; he is bound by the divine law himself. Every move he makes is underpinned by a reliance on divine guidance and support, casting him not as the legislator, but the executive carrying out celestial orders. His status, akin to a CEO appointed by the heavens, reaches its zenith in his duty to handle the profound weight of revelation with meticulous care, tasked with delivering this sacred trust to humanity, ensuring that if he fails in this, his mission remains unfulfilled {وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَغْتُ رسالاتِك} (Al-Ma'idah:67).

Despite the Prophet's towering importance and the sheer magnitude of his mission, the Quran never elevates him to the status of a legislator. His wisdom, his profound intellect, and his exemplary way of life are entirely devoted to navigating the complexities of divine revelation, to enacting its directives without overstepping the bounds. He is tasked, not with creating laws, but with living out the divine script—inviting others to follow, not to worship him, as stated {كُونُوا عبادًا لي} (Al-Imran:79), "be servants of me..." Yet, for those who have draped history with sanctity, who peer into collections of sayings and actions and see flashes of hidden wisdom or 'non-recited revelations', the lines blur. For them, delving into what is forbidden and permissible beyond the Quranic text becomes less daunting, almost natural. They find it all too easy to assert that 'whatever the Prophet prohibits is akin to what Allah prohibits', ³³ {إِنَّمَا حَرَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ فَهُوَ مُثْلُ مَا حَرَمَ اللَّهُ}, weaving a narrative that places tradition on a par with divine decree. When we carve out an alternate source of divine instruction beyond the Quran, it's only natural that verses like {يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ لَمْ تَحْرِمْ مَا أَحْلَلَ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبْتَغِي مَرْضَاتَ أَزْوَاجِكَ} (At-Tahrim), which translates to "O Prophet, why do you forbid what Allah has made lawful for you, in your quest to please your wives..." start to drift into the shadows.



Uswah Versus Hikmah/Sunnah

Two Sources, Divergent Narratives

The quest to define Sunnah through the notion of Hikmah (wisdom) and the subsequent hunt for 'non-recited revelations' as its source, brewed a storm of intellectual confusion. This storm eventually allowed the winds of history to seep into the sacred chambers of revelation. Subtly, almost innocently, it granted historical narratives the audacity to meddle with divine insights—providing a theoretical justification for history to toy with the interpretation of sacred texts. The crux of this muddle lies in our eclectic approach to epistemology, our whimsical way of slapping historical tags on divine concepts, blurring the definitive lines of faith. By meshing the terms of history with the decrees of the Quran, we've smeared layers of ambiguity across what should be crystal clear. If only we had clung to 'Uswah'—the Quranic portrayal of the Prophet's example—rather than diluting it into the nebulous realm of Sunnah, perhaps we wouldn't find ourselves digging through the dusty archives of history, forsaking the timeless wisdom of the Quran in pursuit of echoes in the sands of time.

In the early stages, the term 'Sunnah' echoed broadly across the landscapes of Quranic language, roping in not just the practices of Prophet Muhammad but also those revered actions of his Companions. It was more than a tradition; it was a well-trodden path designed to steer the faithful clear of straying. But as time unfurled, 'Sunnah' morphed, slipping into the same vernacular space as 'Hadith'. There came a moment when the spoken Sunnah began to eclipse those age-old established practices, sowing seeds of divergence in how even the most

foundational religious duties were performed. Every sect clung to its version of the Sunnah, each claiming legitimacy, bolstered by an assortment of historical narrations that supported their spoken traditions.

As historical portrayals of Sunnah diverged, Muslims fragmented into distinct jurisprudential factions, each clinging to the belief that the true Sunnah was theirs alone. This deep veneration for the historical documentation of Sunnah evolved into a scenario where belief in these human-compiled records of Sunnah became intertwined with one's faith. Yet, if the Quranic concept of 'Uswah'—the Prophet's living example—had been the focal point instead of Sunnah or Hadith, the need to campaign for its adoption as a component of faith would have been redundant. The Quran itself mandates believers to follow him. By sidestepping Quranic terminology and embracing the jargon of historical scholarship, we didn't just elevate history to a holy pedestal; we turned the universally acknowledged model of the Prophet's example into a source of division among believers, muddying clear waters with the silt of scholarly debate.

Today, faith in the Sunnah has morphed into something peculiar: it demands not just adherence to the Prophet's example but an unwavering acceptance of his historical accounts as gospel truth, letter by sacred letter. This convolution birthed by the term 'Sunnah' has thrust believers into a quandary: should they lean on divine revelation or sift through the sands of history in their quest for the Sunnah? Neither source offers an entirely consistent portrayal of the Prophet's life—a discrepancy that's not just a scholarly oversight but a fundamental necessity. After all, if history and revelation spoke with the same voice, what would be left for revelation to claim over history?

The Quran sketches the silhouette of a man whose life is a masterclass in righteousness, a messenger whose every utterance springs not from personal whim but from the direct, unadulterated

revelations of the divine. — "وَمَا يَنْطَقُ عَنِ الْهُوَى إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَى" — these words are not his own, but rather revelations bestowed upon him, stark and profound. God himself lays down a testimony of his authenticity, shattering any notions of error or deceit: "مَاضِلٌ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَاغُوَى" — your companion is neither misguided nor deceived. Far from being a bewitched man, he is the final prophet, the chosen vessel for celestial wisdom. Charged by the divine, his mission is clear: "اتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَيَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ" — Follow the revelation sent down from your Lord. His essence is woven with gentleness, a trait so palpable it's almost divine — "فِيمَا رَحْمَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لَنْتَ" — It is by the mercy of Allah that you were gentle with them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. This gentleness infuses his followers, creating a tapestry of compassion, a community known for their mercy towards each other. As a harbinger of good news and a solemn guardian against peril, he stands as a beacon of mercy for all humanity, "كَافِةً لِلنَّاسِ بِشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا", a mercy to the world. In the vast expanse of faith, believers find no greater exemplar, no more vivid a paradigm of virtue than his.

In stark contrast to the Quran's depiction of a messenger—a pristine beacon of divine utterance, unwavering in his fidelity "وَمَا يَنْطَقُ عَنِ الْهُوَى" (he does not speak from his own desire)—historical accounts from the Hadith sketch a figure shadowed by complexities. Here, this prophet occasionally speaks under an ominous influence, uttering phrases like, "تَلَكَ الْغَرَانِيقُ الْعَالَى إِنْ شَفَاعَهُنَّ لَتَرْتَعِي", suggesting high-flying cranes whose intercession is earnestly hoped for. While the Quran vehemently denies any bewitchment, portraying him as an unblemished channel of the divine, the Hadith whispers of a man besieged by sorcery, a struggle that stretched from half a year to a full cycle around the sun. The Quran heralds following this Prophet as the quintessential model for the faithful, a steadfast beacon guiding the believers. Yet, the woven

tapestries of tradition paint him as an artisan of the divine will, altering the qibla's direction, distilling the day's prayers from fifty to a mere five, and asserting the Quran should be recited in seven distinct dialects.

The Quran lauds this messenger for his unparalleled gentleness and stellar manners, framing them as divine gifts of mercy. Yet, delve into the annals of his life's accounts, and a more tangled narrative unfolds—one that hints at familial discord. If you lean into the whispers of the Hadith narrators, particularly those dissecting the verse from Surah Al-Baqarah لَا يُؤْخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللِّغُو فِي إِيمَانِكُمْ}, you encounter a version of the messenger who occasionally strays from the path of fairness when he's wounded or displeased. While it might be a single wife who sparks his ire, his choice to pull away from everyone raises eyebrows. How does this retreat, this broad brush of solitude he paints across all his relationships, mirror the paragon of conduct he's meant to exemplify?

Here we see two starkly different, clashing visions of the messenger, each emerging from disparate sources. The truth is, when we anchor the messenger's Uswah—his exemplary model—in the sands of historical narratives, we're not just grounding his legacy in reality; we're exposing it to the distortions and outright fabrications of narrators. This approach doesn't merely create a collection of sayings and deeds under the banner of tradition; it gives birth to a so-called 'authenticated history' that, upon closer inspection, struggles to even merit the label of history.³⁴ Calling this a factual recount is not just an overstatement—it's an act of sheer will, forcing clarity where there is none.

Sunnah, History, and the Dilemma of Credibility

As I've previously noted, for Muslims, embracing the Prophet's Uswah (personal example) is as essential as adhering to the Quran itself. The Uswah is not merely a set of behaviors but the living embodiment of Quranic teachings, holding the same incontrovertible authority as the scripture itself. In an ideal scenario, if the sanctity of the Prophet's Uswah had been preserved, the clarity of revelation would have remained unclouded, free from historical or interpretive distortions.

Reality, however, tells a different, more complicated story. Under the expansive term 'Sunnah'—which traditionally captures the teachings and practices attributed to the Prophet—there's been a palpable shift. Our attention has drifted from the Uswah's vibrant demonstration of divine principles toward embracing historical accounts also under the Sunnah banner. Esteemed scholars, commentators, and hadith collectors have started to champion these narratives as if they possess the foundational gravitas of the direct actions and sayings central to the Uswah. This shift has cemented a belief that the compilations known as Sunnah are as binding and authentic as the divine messages enshrined in the Quran. Imam Tirmidhi, who regards his Sunan as a pivotal reference, epitomizes this shift. He asserts, "من كان في بيته (ترمذني) فكانما في بيته"—"Whoever has [the book of Tirmidhi] in his house, it is as if the Prophet is speaking in his house."³⁵ This profound claim highlights how texts compiled as Sunnah have become interwoven with the authentic voice of the Prophet's Uswah, blurring the lines between the Prophet's direct model and the broader traditions attributed to him.

The Hadith books have been vaulted to an exalted plane, deemed beyond the reach of mere historical inaccuracies or human errors. If a Hadith appears within the revered confines of the six authentic books (Sahih Sittah), it's widely accepted as unimpeachable proof that these words were spoken directly by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself. Wali al-Din Tabrizi makes it clear: any Hadith linked to the Sahih collections is as if whispered by the Prophet. This comes after Hadith scholars have rigorously sifted through these narrations, anointing them with the seal of ultimate truth.³⁶ Such sanctification of the hadith compilations leaves scant space for skepticism—are we just cementing our faith in a constructed history, neglecting to truly scrutinize the words attributed to the Prophet? This scenario casts a romantic yet potentially misleading aura over the texts, nudging us into a reverence that may eclipse the need for critical engagement with the Prophet's actual teachings.

The concept of the Prophet's Sunnah, although somewhat loosely defined, resonated with the Quranic ideal of Uswah (example) and significantly elevated historical narratives to a level of reverence seen in earlier religious traditions. Once history began to be recognized as an ongoing source of revelation, particularly concerning the Prophet's sayings, a myriad of traditions sprang up to support this veneration. The idea of additional revelation outside of the Quran has always been controversial and somewhat foreign. This issue, especially the debates about what truly constitutes the wisdom (hikmah) or essence of Sunnah, was a major point of contention among second-century scholars. Early Muslims, including prominent companions, held firmly to the Quran alone, encapsulating their dedication in the saying "حسبنا كتاب الله" (The Book of Allah is sufficient for us), which highlighted their exclusive reliance on the Quranic text.

We've already touched upon how the elder companions, bound by profound love and an indelible connection to the Prophet, successfully

staved off the encroachment of 'Mishnah' into Muhammad's teachings. Yet, as the tides of time turned, and Muslim perceptions of history fell prey to various calamities we've noted earlier, history began to morph into a canonical source of religious doctrine. It was in this transformation that certain hadiths took on a defining role, particularly the one where the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is quoted: "إِنِّي قَدْ خَلَفْتُ فِيهِمَا شَيْئَنِ لَنْ تَضَلُّو بَعْدَهُمَا إِبْدًا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَسُنْنَتِي حَتَّىٰ يَرْدَ عَلَى الْحَوْضِ" (Indeed, I have left among you two things, after which you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah, until you return to me at the Pool).³⁷ Some might argue that the Sunnah referenced in this hadith is precisely the Uswah of the Prophet, a model eternally captured and authenticated by the Quran itself. From this angle, such hadiths aren't pointing to dual sources of religious authority. However, this reasoning has its flaws, because the sayings of the Prophet, passed down through the layers of history, cannot be divorced from their historical backdrop. While certain hadiths underscore a commitment to the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ Sunnah, others expand this notion to encompass the practices of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs', suggesting that the concept of Sunnah is not just influenced by history—it's born from it.³⁸ This idea that Sunnah is best expressed through historical narratives hints at a complex weave: the Sunnah, as depicted, is not wholly contained within the Quran's verses but sprawls across the expanse of time and tradition.

The hadith that speaks of a "Pool" (Hawd), referred to as "إِنِّي قَدْ خَلَفْتُ فِيهِمَا شَيْئَنِ لَنْ تَضَلُّو بَعْدَهُمَا إِبْدًا كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَسُنْنَتِي حَتَّىٰ يَرْدَ عَلَى الْحَوْضِ" (Indeed, I have left among you two things, after which you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah, until you return to me at the Pool), finds itself scrutinized — widely regarded not as a whisper of the divine but as a fabrication by storytellers. This portrayal of history as a legitimate source of religious truth is not rooted in revelation but in an era fraught with political maneuverings within the Muslim community. It was a time when factions freely used sanctified history to bolster their own

stances. This perspective is bolstered by hadiths that excessively praise Imam Ali or amplify the virtues of Uthman and Muawiya to surreal extents.³⁹ Furthermore, this narration is viewed through a completely different lens by Shia scholars. In their interpretation, the "two things" mentioned are not the Book of Allah and the Prophet's Sunnah, but the Ahl al-Bayt, the Prophet's family.⁴⁰ This profound disparity between Sunni understanding of the Sunnah and Shia interpretation of 'Ahl al-Bayt' has led to the emergence of two distinct and separate religious doctrines. Whether the Sunni depiction or the Shia perspective is deemed more authentic, this discussion around these hadiths casts a shadow of doubt over what many consider to be a foundational pillar of the religion.

If we could slice through the thick curtains of history—a task only possible with the scalpel of revelation—we'd have to confront whether the notions of the "Sunnah of the Prophet" or the "Ahl al-Bayt" actually resonated in the era of the companions. Moreover, it's essential to discern the sources early Muslims turned to when they delved into these critical pillars of their belief. Did the Prophet Muhammad explicitly point his followers towards certain erudite companions or specific anthologies of sayings regarding the Sunnah? And were the early Muslims compelled to align themselves with the leading figures of the Prophet's family, the Ahl al-Bayt?

The Quran, the pristine reflection of Islamic doctrine, explicitly mentions no secondary sources of religious truth, not directly nor by implication. Aisha's profound observation about the Prophet, "كان خلقه القرآن" (His character was the Quran),⁴¹ points to the notion that what we now interpret as the Sunnah—every dimension of the Prophet's example—is deeply embedded within the eternal script of the Quran. Yet, despite the Quran's clear presence, to search for the Prophet's guidance in collections of sayings and actions not only suggests placing historical accounts above divine revelation but also leads us to chase a

form of wisdom that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor his Rightly Guided Caliphs officially bequeathed to the community.

History, no matter how meticulously authenticated, can never attain the divine trust vested in revelation. If we find flaws in the human compilation of the Prophet's Sunnah—one of the twin pillars of faith—it would, in essence, imply defects within the religion itself. To entertain such a notion within the context of Muhammad's faith is unthinkable. We are, therefore, left with no choice but to rigorously examine those narratives that present themselves as an additional source of divine guidance, outside the established revelation, demanding veneration usually reserved for the Quran.

In our view, the concept of treating history as a form of unrecited revelation—what's termed "wahy ghayr matluw"—was born out of an era rife with upheaval and political entanglements. During this time, various political factions clung to sanctified history to shore up their own narratives. If the Prophet's Sunnah had truly been as integral to Islamic practice outside the Quran as within, we wouldn't see such a tumult of conflicting definitions about what exactly constitutes the Sunnah. Moreover, if the Sunnah were indeed a standalone source of divine guidance apart from the Quran, it's unthinkable that the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Khulafa-e-Rashideen) would have neglected to inform the Muslim community about it, choosing instead to leave its organization to later generations like the Tabi'un and Tabi' al-Tabi'in. This pivotal task, dictated by the discretionary whims of individual hadith scholars without any governmental oversight, resulted in a mosaic of documents rather than a singular, authoritative source of the Sunnah. This scenario sketches a portrait of a fragmented tradition, pieced together long after the caliphs' reign, suggesting a piecemeal legacy rather than a solid foundation laid by those closest to the Prophet.

The prevailing notion of the Prophet's Sunnah, which has nudged us to scour the pages of tradition and sayings in search of it, arrived on the scene of our cultural history so belatedly that the debates surrounding it are far from settled. Scholars and hadith experts are still charting the territories of the Prophet's Sunnah. While one circle of scholars interprets the Prophet Muhammad's words, actions, and tacit approvals as embodying the Sunnah,⁴² another sees potential for deriving the Sunnah even from his silence.⁴³ There are those who view the Sunnah through the lens of both the Prophet's human and divine natures, arguing that every aspect of his life is instructive.⁴⁴ In contrast, some diminish the significance of his human experiences, citing examples like the Berirah incident and the hadith about tree planting to underscore their stance.⁴⁵

According to one scholarly group, the Sunnah certainly includes the words, actions, and explicit approvals of the Prophet, but it specifically applies to those aspects not detailed in the Quran. They define the Sunnah as "that which emanates from the Prophet, excluding the Quran" (*والسنة هاهنا ما صدر عن النبي غير القرآن*).⁴⁶ This array of interpretations hints that a definitive, universally agreed-upon definition of the Prophet's Sunnah—a concept shaped by history—still awaits establishment. Lingering questions such as where the Prophet's human role ends and his prophetic role begins, and whether the representation of the Prophet's example within the Quran falls outside what we define as Sunnah, persist. These inquiries remain unresolved, echoing through the discipline, even as we concede history as a continual source of unrecited revelation. Accepting that the Sunnah includes only "that which is not in the Quran" unmistakably suggests we are intentionally sidestepping the Quran, the most authentic repository of the Prophet's example. If this is indeed our approach, then it's less about seeking the Sunnah and more about consciously turning away from it. Becoming entangled in interpretations rather than direct revelation, and relying

on the constructs of our own historical narratives for enlightenment, borders on a subtle form of idolatry. Just as idols can never truly fulfill our spiritual quests, history too falls short, unable to carry out the divine duty of delivering unaltered revelation.

By attributing the sanctity of revelation to history, we didn't just divert our gaze from the true essence of revelation; we also cluttered our intellectual and cultural heritage with a maze of theoretical and ideological confusions. Jurists and hadith scholars found themselves engrossed in speculative, trivial, and needless debates that were starkly detached from the core principles of the faith. These were discussions that, if never broached, would not have left a dent in our understanding of the pristine faith. Take, for instance, the endless dissections of matters the Quran either explicitly dismissed or chose to remain silent about. Books of hadith brimmed with conflicting reports on topics as minute as the implications of touching one's genitals, which scholars zealously dissected. These narratives clashed so sharply that reaching any form of consensus was a pipe dream—perhaps that was the point all along: to mire the community in the muck of unnecessary, contentious minutiae.

Despite the centuries-long debates and meticulous scholarly efforts, certain contentious issues remain unresolved, demanding definitive discussions. Take, for instance, the debate over whether touching one's genitals nullifies wudu (ablution). The Shafi'i scholars argue it does,⁴⁷ supported by their selected hadiths, while the Hanafi school challenges this view with another hadith that essentially categorizes the genitals as just another part of the body, no different in its impact on purity than any other limb.⁴⁸ So, how do we reconcile these conflicting interpretations? The tools of historical criticism and the principles for evaluating hadiths—tools born from history itself—are double-edged swords, potentially as effective in opponents' hands as in those who wield them for defense. If divine revelation does not explicitly cover

these topics, the various Islamic legal schools will continue crafting rules to weaken the hadiths opposing their doctrines, often declaring the transmission chains that don't support their views as weak or flawed.⁴⁹ For instance, Imam Tahawi, supporting the Hanafi stance, denounces all opposing narrations as compromised, while Imam Bayhaqi, a Shafi'i scholar, dismisses Tahawi's expertise in hadith with the dismissive remark, "إِنَّ عِلْمَ الْحَدِيثِ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنْ ضَاعِتَهُ" (The science of hadith was not his field of expertise).

Consider this quirky conundrum about whether eating food cooked over fire nullifies ablution (wudu). From the trove of traditions, one narrative from Abu Huraira tells us that the Prophet Muhammad instructed, "Perform ablution from the touch of fire" (توضوء مما مسسته النار).⁵⁰ But twist the lens, and there's Abu Huraira again, recounting how the Prophet himself nibbled on a piece of cheese cooked over fire and then prayed without renewing his wudu,⁵¹ suggesting that munching on cooked food doesn't disturb the state of purification. Then there's the famed hadith that declares, "There is no prayer for the one without ablution, and there is no ablution for the one who does not mention the name of Allah upon it" (لَا صَلَاةٌ لِمَنْ لَا وَضْوَءٌ لَهُ وَلَا وَضْوَءٌ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَذْكُرْ إِسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ).⁵² This narrative swirls controversy because not everyone buys into the notion that intoning "Bismillah" is a requisite for valid ablution. Critics who poke at this tradition often point to the Prophet's practice—like the time when he only returned greetings after completing his ablution, explaining he didn't like to mention Allah's name without being in a state of purification.⁵³

The more we tried to mesh these narratives together, the more the issue spiraled into complexity, illuminating an ever-widening rift between Sunnah and Hadith.⁵⁴ Navigating this maze demanded the discernment and interpretative savvy of seasoned scholars. The presence of contradictory hadiths in the scriptural collections essentially carved out a space for a specialized form of jurisprudence—one that

necessitated the presence of erudite experts. These were the maestros of the Hadith, the deep divers into the vast seas of narratives who could discern which tales were to guide the faithful and which were mere echoes of past practices. These scholars were not just reconcilers of conflicting accounts but also decoders of religious evolution, tasked with determining which practices were outdated and which remained relevant. Imam Tahawi gives us a peek into this intricate dance of doctrine: once, eating cooked food mandated a fresh ablution, but this requirement was later lifted—reflecting a religion in motion, its practices evolving alongside its followers.

Previously, we've touched upon the notion that history, left to its own devices, cannot decisively settle any debate. The intellectual results churned out by jurists and hadith experts are hardly the final word on contentious issues. Their methods, their deep dives into historical context, or their nuanced understanding of religious law often don't translate across the varied landscapes of Islamic thought. When the critique and validation of hadiths seem to skew in favor of one Islamic school over another, it's often dismissed as scholarly bias. As a result, despite the meticulous efforts of these experts to stitch together the frayed edges of differing narratives, they often end up short of bridging the deep divides, leaving the field of Islamic scholarship dotted with unresolved conflicts and ongoing debates.

When the Sunan books, filled with their conjectural narrations, were deemed sources of Sharia, divine revelation was subtly sidelined. This was just the beginning: it cracked open the door for a kind of legal scholarship reminiscent of rabbinic traditions to seep into Muhammad's religion. It also fostered a culture of appropriating both verified and dubious legal precedents from past nations and abolished laws, claiming them as beneficial. Imam Shu'bah, witnessing this shift, poignantly remarked to his student, "The more you delve into hadith, the further you drift from the Quran" (كلما تقدمتم في الحديث تأخرتم عن القرآن).⁵⁵ It's a

striking commentary on how the very essence of the Prophet's mission—to liberate people from the tangled webs of clerical legalism, to dismantle the nitpicking legal intricacies championed by Pharisees and rabbis—was being undone. His followers were unintentionally laying the groundwork for a renaissance of ancient laws, guided by the principle that "the laws of those before us are our laws, unless explicitly refuted" ("شرع من قبلنا شرعنا ما لم ينكر").

In the most revered collections of hadith about the Prophet Muhammad, stories involving the ancient Jews are positioned as legal markers for the Muslim community. One narrative that Bukhari recounts, cited from Abu Hurairah, goes like this: "A man from the Children of Israel asked another to lend him a thousand dinars. He then took a piece of wood, hollowed it out, placed the thousand dinars inside, and threw it into the sea. The lender later retrieved this piece of wood, intending to use it as firewood. When he split the wood, he discovered the money inside" إن رجلاً من بنى إسرائيل سئل بعد بنى إسرائيل ان ليس فيه ألف دينار فد ("فعمراً إلية فخرج في البحر فلم يجد مركباً فأخذ خشبة فتقرها فادخل فيها ألف دينار. فرمي في البحر فخرج الرجل الذي اسلفه فإذا بالخشبة فأخذها لأهله حطباً فذكر الحديث فلما نشر الحديث وجد").⁵⁶ Drawing from this tale, Bukhari deduced that since the Prophet only narrated the incident and remained silent on whether the retrieved money should be subjected to khums (a fifth given as charity), and given the legal axiom "the law of those before us is our law unless explicitly denied" ("شرع من قبلنا شرعنا ما لم ينكر"), scholars have ruled that items retrieved from the sea are exempt from khums.

The habit of gleaning legal principles from ancient scriptures has taken such firm root in the hadith collections that not even the Quran's clear-cut verses have managed to override these supposed ancestral laws. Take, for example, the issue of stoning (rajm): it's suggested that Prophet Muhammad kept this punishment alive, borrowing it from Jewish traditions. This approach appeals particularly to those who elevate historical narratives above direct divine revelation, seeing

history as a lens through which to interpret the sacred. These individuals are sometimes willing to entertain rather dubious notions—for instance, the belief that the verse on stoning was indeed revealed but somehow failed to make its way into the Quran's final text, or that it remains valid in practice even though its recitation has been discontinued. Advocating such views inevitably casts a shadow of doubt over the Quran's supposed infallibility and divine safeguarding. Yet, for those who place history on a pedestal, equating it with unrecited revelation and viewing it as the ultimate interpreter of divine will, such inconsistencies are not just minor hiccups but necessary reconciliations. They find themselves compelled to weave these ambiguities into their understanding, striving to reconcile the eternal with the temporal, often at the cost of clarity and coherence in the divine narrative.

To elevate history to the stature of religious law, it wasn't enough to just label it as history; it had to be framed as "Authenticated History." The efforts of hadith scholars to draft stringent principles for hadith evaluation, to sift through the chaff and pinpoint the authentic narrations, accomplished something profound: they cast a shadow of doubt over a vast array of spurious and fanciful historical accounts. Tomes dedicated to debunked myths were penned, and the fabrications of charlatans were relegated to the dustbin of history. Yet, through the rigorous mesh of critical scrutiny, the narratives that emerged on the other side, stamped with various seals of authenticity, began to be revered almost as echoes of unrecited revelation. If the Quran sketches the broad strokes, these hadith collections have come to be seen as the detailed, authoritative annotations of that sketch. They are not just footnotes but essential texts, believed to clarify and decode the divine directives housed within the Quran's succinct verses.

As this notion gained traction, it swayed some scholars to value even the flimsiest of hadiths over analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) or juristic preference (*istehsan*). What often got glossed over in this shift is that

the hadiths identified as weak by the scholars themselves shouldn't be seen as the words of the Prophet, but rather as attributions foisted upon him. Moreover, the principles for critiquing hadiths, formulated by the scholars, are steeped in their personal discretion, insight into religion, and intellectual capacities. These criteria are not uniform but vary significantly from one scholar to another, breeding inconsistencies in the evaluation of narrators (*jarh wa-ta'dil*) and the verification of chains of narration (*sanad*). Relying on these human-crafted principles to definitively interpret religious law is akin to granting historical accounts an undue significance, placing the opinions of men above divine revelation. With the development of sciences like the authentication of narrators and the critique of their reliability (*jarh wa-ta'dil*), it has subtly led to the collections of hadith being treated as though they are the definitive sources of the Prophet's teachings.

As the years rolled on, the interpretive texts penned by jurists and hadith scholars started to feel like enough to guide through all of life's twists and turns.⁵⁷ It became a kind of unspoken rule: to be acknowledged as a mujtahid, a scholar versed in independent judgment, you needed an arsenal of hadiths and the traditions of the companions at your fingertips. There's a tale about Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal that when he was asked whether knowing a hundred thousand hadiths was enough to qualify someone to issue religious edicts, he shot that down. But, he posited that if you could wrap your head around half a million hadiths, then maybe, just maybe, you were ready to take the seat of a fatwa issuer.⁵⁸

This elevation of history to a central pillar in Muhammad's religion meant that the Quran, ostensibly the primary guidebook, ended up somewhat on the sidelines. Delving into the convoluted world of hadiths, with its vast sea of narratives to memorize, critique, and the intense scrutiny needed to assess the reliability of their narrators, turned the study of Muhammad's teachings into a labyrinthine task. Scholars,

buried under the weight of reconciling these countless narratives, found themselves navigating a maze more intricate than most could manage, transforming the pursuit of religious understanding into a Herculean task of intellectual acrobatics.

To many, it had become clear that safety did not lie in diving into the boundless depths of sayings and traditions, but rather in grounding themselves in the interpretations handed down by earlier scholars. The Quran, once a clear and definitive guide, found itself enveloped in a dense jungle of scholarly texts. Like the ancient religions entwined with Pharisees and rabbis, Muhammad's faith had grown dependent on these venerable interpretations. When the task of interpreting divine revelation was relinquished to the murky realms of history—a domain that spread like wild undergrowth—it inevitably resulted in a situation where specialized scholars assumed the roles of divine interpreters. This transition had placed us in a predicament similar to that of the People of the Book. Here, the Pharisees and rabbis, entangled in their complex Talmudic literature, had transformed from educators to interpreters, wielding their knowledge not merely as a means of guidance but as gatekeepers of faith. Their roles had expanded from simple recitation and scholarly debate to embodying the full authority of religious figures, elevating them from mere scholars to revered and authoritative custodians of the faith.

When History Rewrites the Sacred The Unseen Battle Over Revelation

The choice to exalt history alongside the Sunnah, crowning it as the sole valid lens through which to view the Quranic revelation, naturally spawned a pivotal query: When the Quran and the Sunnah—the twin pillars of revelation—clash, which holds the final word? Under the newly sanctified aura of history, the hadiths ascended to the status of unrecited revelations, positing that while the Quran sketches broad strokes, the Sunnah fills in the vivid details. This perspective hardened into a scholarly consensus that the detailed insights of the Sunnah should always override the Quran's broader directives. Anchored by the Quranic phrase "...لَبِيَنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نَزَّلْ إِلَيْهِمْ" (to clarify to the people what was sent down to them), a doctrine took root among the interpreters: the Sunnah, not the Quran, clarifies divine intent, leading to the pervasive belief that "مَتَّى وَقَعَ تَعَارُضٌ بَيْنَ الْقُرْآنِ وَالْحَدِيثِ وَجَبَ تَقْدِيمُ الْحَدِيثِ لَأَنَّ الْقُرْآنَ مُجَمَّلٌ وَالْحَدِيثُ مُبِينٌ" (when there's a contradiction between the Quran and Hadith, the Hadith must be prioritized because the Quran is general and the Hadith is specific).⁵⁹

This glorification of history as the arbiter of divine meaning essentially allowed for the supersession of direct divine revelation itself. Once history was ordained as the clarifier, it wielded the power not just to interpret the Quran's meanings but to redefine the divine boundaries themselves, through concocted accounts of revelation occasions and contested readings. It even claimed the audacious right to announce the abrogation of divine commands as it saw fit, based on these historical

Fabrications. The landscape of Quranic interpretation is littered with instances where history, under the guise of elucidation, has twisted and turned divine revelation to fit its narrative.

First, let's take the inheritance verse. The Quran commands in Surah Al-Baqarah, in no uncertain terms, that believers are required to make a will for their parents and close relatives when death approaches: "كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدُكُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُ إِنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا وَهِيَ لِلْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ بِالْمُعْرُوفِ حَفًا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ" (Al-Baqarah 180-182). Another piece in Surah Al-Ma'idah insists on the arrangement of witnesses for those intending to make a will, emphasizing the piety of these witnesses during their duty: "يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا شَهَادَةُ بَنِتَكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدُكُمُ الْمُؤْمِنُ حِينَ الْوَصِيَّةِ" (Al-Ma'idah:106). These directives, revealed at different times, compel believers not only to make wills but also to ensure their proper implementation in line with the principles of justice and fairness. Yet, it is profoundly unsettling to see how our scholars, entrenched in their interpretations and historical narrations, declare these Quranic verses on wills as abrogated. They wield a fictional hadith, "لَا وصِيَّةٌ لوارثٍ" (no bequest for an heir), as a judicial override. Some suggest that the inheritance guidelines in Surah An-Nisa essentially strip the dying of their right to will. Yet, the directives in the Quran about wills specifically address the dying, while the rules of inheritance broadly speak to society, the era's governance, and the heirs. Intriguingly, each clause about inheritance in these verses comes tethered with "مِنْ بَعْدِ وصِيَّةٍ" (after any will)—clarifying that these rules were revealed with a mindful nod to existing will directives, meant to complement rather than cancel them. No line within the Quran itself hints that the verses on wills are obsolete. Nonetheless, for those holding the view that the command concerning wills has been nullified—a stance cemented in their legal texts—their only recourse lies in clinging to the hadith "لَا وصِيَّةٌ لوارثٍ," which they uphold as irrefutable, and which has, in effect, kept these Quranic verses in the shadows for centuries.

The hadith that purportedly abrogates the Quranic verses on wills is shrouded in doubt about its authenticity. Notably absent in the authoritative collections of Muwatta, Muslim, and Bukhari, it appears in Tirmidhi, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, and Nasa'i, each presenting it through various chains that suggest a murky past. Abu Dawood even dedicates a chapter titled "Chapter on Abrogating the Will for Parents and Relatives," emphasizing its controversial stance. Despite these narrations, the contradictions within the texts are stark, making them unreliable. For example, Ibn Abbas's statement in Bukhari, "كَانَ الْمَالُ لِلْوَالِدِينَ فَنَسَخَ اللَّهُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ" (وَكَانَتِ الْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَالِدِينَ فَنَسَخَ اللَّهُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ) suggests a pre-Islamic context where inheritance excluded daughters, not a post-Quranic context where wills include both parents and relatives. Additionally, narrations by Abu Umamah al-Bahili, Amr bin Kharijah, and Anas bin Malik, reported in these books, contain significant inconsistencies and involve unknown narrators, rendering these reports questionable and generally inadmissible.⁶⁰

Declaring history, which can't even stand up to its own scholarly scrutiny, as the master key to revelation isn't just an injustice to the divine word—it's a disservice to history itself. Despite their foundational weaknesses, the narratives have gained such notoriety, especially noted under the chapter "لا وصية لوارث" (لَا وصِيَّةٌ لِوَارِثٍ) in Bukhari (curiously devoid of any hadiths), that they've ascended to a status of Mustafidh. This term, in scholarly circles, is reserved for when a weak narration becomes so ingrained in popular acceptance that it's deemed unnecessary to challenge. The prominence of "لا وصية لوارث" has effectively frozen, sidelined, and even nullified the Quranic verses concerning wills.

One particularly striking case centers on the term "Kalalah," whose popular definition is purely a product of historical records and has effectively eclipsed the Quranic explanation. Tafsir tomes almost universally declare "Kalalah" to mean someone "who has neither children nor parents" (من لا ولد له ولا والد). This interpretation has gained

such traction that even linguistic scholars push it forward. Yet, the Quran articulates it differently. In Surah An-Nisa, verse 176, it clarifies, "إِنْ أَمْرُهُ هَلْكٌ لَيْسَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَهُ أُخْتٌ" (If a person dies leaving no children but has a sister), showing that 'Kalalah' refers to a deceased leaving siblings, not direct offspring. This direct Quranic definition seldom makes its rounds in the usual discourse of Fiqh and Tafsir—overshadowed by a thicket of historical interpretations. The established narrative insists that "إِنْ كَانَ رَجُلٌ يُورثُ كَلَالَةً أَوْ امْرَأَةٌ وَلَهُ أَخٌ أَوْ أُخْتٌ فَلَكُلُّ وَاحِدٍ مِنْهُمَا السُّدُسُ" (If a man or woman passes leaving no direct heir but has a sibling, each sibling should inherit a sixth) refers mainly to maternal siblings (من أمه). It's whispered in scholarly circles that Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas would recite this verse with the addition "from the mother,"⁶¹ a phrase purported to have been in Ubayy bin Ka'b's Mus'haf, now conspicuously absent from modern Quranic texts.

Believe it or not, the stark reality is that nearly all contemporary Quranic scholars find themselves shackled by the ghost of a supposed Mus'haf attributed to Ubayy bin Ka'b when they interpret certain verses. Those eager to dodge these dubious tales claim a consensus among scholars on interpreting "from the mother" as referring to half-siblings, a tidy, if questionable resolution. The prevalent, non-Quranic interpretation of "Kalalah" and reliance on narratives that bend and twist revelation have knotted up scholarly discourse into convoluted debates under the guise of consensus. This debacle has morphed scholarly circles into battlegrounds, wrestling over jurisprudential schools of thought. By sidelining explicit Quranic articulations and embracing contorted readings of sacred texts, we've not just sidelined the Quranic worldview—we've lost ourselves in history's labyrinthine back alleys, with no apparent exit in sight.

In the wake of such grave misunderstandings and the suffocating grip of historical narratives, it might have been hoped that later scholars, having sifted through the layers of analysis and critique, might

forge a pathway back to the original insights of the Quranic worldview. Yet, history put up a roadblock, not from its own tangled webs, but claiming these snarls were spawned by revelation itself. It's whispered that even Caliph Umar exited the world harboring a regret—that he hadn't questioned the Prophet directly about the conundrum of "Kalalah."⁶² Amid these aggressive assaults of history on the Quran and the unwarranted legitimacy afforded to these dubious tales, the Quran morphed into a text shrouded in enigma. And so, our compass in navigating life's myriad matters increasingly became those hefty volumes of sayings and traditions, instead of the clear light of the Quran itself.

In another stark example, the Quranic mandate about hunting while in Ihram gets trampled under the intricate dances of history and tradition. The Quran is unambiguous: "لَا تَقْتُلُوا الصَّيْدَ وَإِنْتُمْ حِرَمٌ" ("{Do not kill game while you are in Ihram...}") it commands clearly, followed by "...وَحِرَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ صَيْدُ الْبَرِّ مَا دَمْتُ حِرَمًا" ("{Hunting on land is forbidden to you as long as you are in Ihram...}") There's no wiggle room here, no gray area to exploit—hunting is off-limits, period. But, oh, how the storied annals of sayings and traditions love to weave their intricate exceptions! They spin tales where those in Ihram somehow end up aiding hunters, echoing the Rabbinical gymnastics more suited to the Talmud than the Quran. The text of the Quran might outright ban hunting, but these traditions, ever so craftily, question just how far one in Ihram can go in assisting hunters without technically hunting themselves.

In the lore of hadith, a curious tale about Abu Qatada threads through the esteemed volumes, showing the clever ways Muslims in Ihram nudged him towards a game they themselves couldn't chase because of their sacred vows. Imagine this: Abu Qatada, not bound by Ihram, oblivious to the wild donkey his companions, draped in their holy garbs, desperately want him to notice. They couldn't just point it out—that would be aiding in hunting, a clear no-go in their state. But

these guys didn't want the prize to just trot away. So, what do they do? They laugh. Loudly. A burst of laughter as a beacon, and voila, Abu Qatada turns, sees the donkey, and makes the kill. They all share the meat later, a communal feast birthed from a loophole. When they later consult the Prophet about whether their laughter-crossed-into-assistance was permissible, he inquires if any gestures towards the game were made by those in Ihram. And here's where the twist of interpretation comes alive in Bukhari's work: While the strictures of Ihram forbid active hunting, leading someone to game with a chuckle seems to slip right through the cracks. Here we have it: not just a story of survival but a portrait of how rules are navigated—how the sacred is intertwined with the cunning human spirit, always dancing on the edges of divine laws.

In Bukhari's taxonomy of the sacred, you'll find a chapter provocatively titled: "إذا رأى المحرمون صيداً فضحكوا ففطن الحال" ("When those in Ihram spot game and chuckle, thus enlightening the non-Ihram"). This isn't just quirky historical trivia—it's a gateway into the elaborate dance between rules and their loopholes. The chapters that follow lay it out in stark black and white: those swathed in the sanctity of Ihram can't directly assist the unholy in hunting. It's clearly spelled out, "لا يعين المحرم" ("الحال في قتل الصيد") ("It is not permissible for those in Ihram to assist those not in Ihram in killing game.") And yet, here's where the sacred text pirouettes: while pointing out game is a flat no, laughing or causing a commotion to signal the game somehow doesn't count. It's all validated by tales of Abu Qatada⁶³ and even cross-checked by the Prophet himself before any meat was eaten: Did any of the Ihram-clad faithful directly point out the game? No? Then the meat's on the menu. This might read like a script from a religiously compliant sitcom, where holy men nudge and wink their way around divine law, turning sacred commands into a playground of technicalities.

Crafting loopholes in the unequivocal Quranic ban on hunting while in Ihram seems to borrow a page straight out of the Talmudic playbook. Much like how Talmudic scholars cleverly divided work into thirty-nine categories to sidestep Sabbath restrictions, the Islamic traditions finagle their way through divine commands with similar agility. Place the Quran's stark directive, "...لا تقتلوا الصيد وأنتم حرم" ("{Do not kill game while you are in Ihram...}"), next to Bukhari's chapter title, "إذا رأى {المحرمون صيدا فضحكوا فقطن الحال" ("When those in Ihram spot game and chuckle, thus alerting those not in Ihram"), and the picture becomes painfully clear. This isn't just interpretation—it's an art form, bending the rigid spine of Quranic text to accommodate the flexible needs of the faithful. It's a dance of legalistic gymnastics where sacred prohibitions are not so much followed as they are ingeniously circumnavigated.

In the sacred state of Ihram, the faithful are cloaked in the solemnity of pilgrimage, yet here we find a contentious divide among scholars about what is permissible to eat. On one side, we have Ali's narration suggesting the Prophet himself shunned the meat of the hunted while swathed in Ihram's sanctity. On the flip side, there's Qatadah's tale, which paints a different picture, one where the Prophet partook of such forbidden fruit. This dichotomy has split Islamic jurisprudence into two camps: the Shafi'is, who clutch tightly to Ali's conservative stance, and the Hanafis, who are drawn to Qatadah's more permissive narrative.

It's a classic theological standoff, each school holding its ground, both deemed equally valid among the ummah. Yet, history, in its intricate dance, hasn't managed to declare one narrative supreme over the other—no narrative can entirely annihilate its opposite. But the cumulative effect of these historical interpretations has been to pry open a sliver of doubt in the iron-clad prohibitions of the divine, suggesting that maybe, just maybe, there's a little wiggle room even in the strictest of God's commands.

History has not only muddled our grasp of divine revelation but, at times, it has acted as a critic and nullifier of the very sanctity that was supposed to protect the Sunnah. When conflicting narrations led to irreconcilable interpretations of Quranic verses, history often couldn't untangle the mess, and the reign of human opinions began to overshadow direct divine guidance. Thus, one hadith began to nullify another, sprouting various Islamic legal schools and making any true adherence to divine revelation nearly impossible. This elevation of scholars and hadith experts to positions of ultimate authority becomes starkly evident when considering the clear guidelines for tayammum (dry ablution) detailed in the Quran. The verse from Surah Al-Ma'idah states: "{O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah, then purify yourselves. But if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and do not find water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it. Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.}" (Al-Ma'idah 5:6). This verse, "﴿إِنَّمَا ﴾ إِنَّمَا لَا مُسْتَمِنَ النِّسَاء فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا { مَاءً" "or if you have contacted women and you find no water}," crisply spells out that in the absence of water, those immersed in janabah (a state of major ritual impurity) must turn to tayammum—dry ablution. Here's the kicker: tayammum isn't just a stand-in for wudu (minor ablution); it steps up as the understudy for ghusl (full ablution) too. The verses lay down not only the conditions for swinging into tayammum but also sketch out its methodology in stark clarity. Supporting this dive into Quranic directives is a tale from Ammar, who, caught in the throes of janabah during a journey and faced with a no-water conundrum, thought rolling in dust might just cover it. Later, seeking a nod of approval from Prophet Muhammad, he got a minimalist revision—just a

wipe of the face and hands would've done the trick. While this narrative seems to affirm and flesh out the tayammum verses, it stirred up a storm when it turned out that Umar wasn't buying what Ammar was selling, laying bare a profound schism in interpretation right among the Prophet's closest circle.

History, ever the obstructor, has effectively barricaded the pathway to grasping the narrative put forth by Ammar concerning the verses on tayammum. As relayed by Abd al-Rahman bin Abza in the collection of Muslim, Umar didn't just reject Ammar's explanation; Ammar himself proposed to cease sharing it altogether, musing, "لَا أَحْدُثُ بِهِ أَحَدًا وَلَمْ يَذْكُرْ" (I will not narrate it to anyone if not mentioned).⁶⁴ It seems there was also a stern consensus, noted among certain narrations, that Abdullah ibn Mas'ud found no scope for tayammum for those in a state of janabah—no matter if water remained elusive for a month. Conversations between Ibn Mas'ud and Abu Musa Ash'ari expose a discord; Ibn Mas'ud's stance did not resonate with Umar. It's mystifying why there'd be any reservation from Umar or Ibn Mas'ud when the Quran distinctly sanctions tayammum as a stand-in for ghusl for those engulfed in janabah. Al-Shafi'i, in a stroke of interpretative ingenuity, suggested that the phrase "...لَا مُسْتَمِنُ النِّسَاءَ" might simply mean touching a woman, rather than indicating a sexual connotation. If that interpretation holds, then the verse doesn't even begin to cover the state of janabah.

It's somewhat mystifying—those who claim deep intimacy with the Quran's linguistic finesse and the nuanced dance of its Arabic, how could they march so far down the path of historical defense that they end up clinging to dubious interpretations of its words? Shah Waliullah pointed out that al-Shafi'i highlighted how Umar and Ibn Mas'ud relegated the term 'contact' to mere hand touching. "أَشَارَ الشَّافِعِيُّ إِلَى أَنَّ عُمَرَوْ {ابنَ مُسْعُودَ كَانَ يَحْمَلُنَّ الْمَلَامِسَةَ عَلَى الْمَلِسِ بِالْيَدِ}"⁶⁵ In Muslim's account concerning Ammar, it is also relayed that Umar, in his refusal to accept Ammar's Quranic interpretation, tersely commented, "نَوْلِيْكَ مَا تَوْلِيْتَ" — "The

burden of your narrative is yours to bear."⁶⁶ It's like they're saying: your theory, your problem.

The verses on tayammum ignited a fiery debate fueled by the twisting maze of sayings and traditions. A clear command was dragged into controversy: could tayammum truly stand in for ghusl for someone steeped in janabah, the deep waters of major ritual impurity? Further stirring the pot, a sticky cloud of uncertainty permanently fogged the Quranic phrase "لَا مُسْتَمِنُ النِّسَاءَ," thanks to the opinions of Umar and Ibn Mas'ud. The notion that a mere touch of a woman could break wudu was a stretch too far, lacking any real grip within the Quranic worldview. Then there's the discordant symphony of interpretations concerning what the Quran really says about someone in janabah—schools of thought proliferated like wildflowers, each sprouting from a different seed of narrative, each deemed valid enough to coexist. As told in Nasa'i, two men presented themselves before the Prophet Muhammad: one spoke of his abstention from prayer in a state of janabah, while the other told of his prayers post-tayammum. The Prophet's endorsement of both actions underlines the narrative.⁶⁷

Peeling back these layers, it's evident how tales of these fabricated disagreements among the earliest Muslim luminaries weave into our collective psyche. These stories, borne from historical mishaps surrounding Quranic verses, secure a permanent nod of approval, weaving a casual disregard for a precise and assured understanding of the Quran into our fabric of faith.⁶⁸

Under the Weight of History The Eclipse of the Sunnah

As the second century drew to a close, a dramatic shift began to reshape the Islamic world. History, once a silent observer, now draped the Sunnah with a cloak of sanctity and definitiveness, colliding head-on with the Sunnah mutawatirah. In this unfolding, two narratives of the Prophet's example—the uswah mutawatirah 'mukashafah' and the sunnah qawliyah 'marwiyah'—evolved separately yet within the same societal backdrop, stretching over two centuries. The uswah mutawatirah 'mukashafah', born from the direct companionship and teachings of the Prophet, cascaded from generation to generation in such a profound cascade that its authenticity was unquestioned; no one felt the itch to historically pick apart this accepted tradition. On the flip side, the seekers of the sunnah qawliyah 'marwiyah' or traditions were not content to lean solely on historical and societal crutches. Their aim? To anchor the Prophet's example in as much detail and accuracy as possible, preserving it beyond the reaches of mere time and social constructs.

In response to these evolving narratives, Islamic scholars like Imam Shafi'i began to author foundational texts, including 'Al-Risalah'. These works aimed to redefine the intersection of spoken Sunnah and the practices of the people of Medina, suggesting a preserved continuity in their daily actions through history's gradual progression. For the first time, it was broadly acknowledged that the spoken Sunnah could serve to validate the continuous Sunnah. Imam Shafi'i emphasized the validity of the spoken Sunnah, keenly aware of the divergence between Imam

Malik's legal teachings and the practices of the people of Medina. This suggested that perhaps the enduring example of the Prophet, as preserved through community practices, might have remained intact in their daily actions through history's gradual progression. Shafi'i's strong insistence on using the spoken Sunnah as definitive proof was not a notion found in Malik's era. Otherwise, why would Imam Malik reject Caliph Mamun's offer to formalize his Muwatta as the definitive guide to religious law across the empire? Malik understood that his Muwatta, while reliable, was conveyed through historical processes and constituted individual reports (*khabar ahad*), suitable for teaching or understanding religion but not authoritative enough to challenge the continuous, experientially transmitted example of the Prophet, which had the validation of successive generations.

By the twilight of this transformative century, the once harmonious dance between the *Uswah Mukashafah* and the *Sunnah Qawliyah* stumbled into discord. Enter Shafi'i's "Al-Risalah," a pioneering text weaving through the corridors of Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and history, which cast long shadows over the landscape of Islamic thought. Once it became gospel that the *Sunnah Qawliyah* held sway over Medina's practices—or the continuous *Uswah*—the spoken Hadiths started playing the role of both judge and jury over the established *Sunnah*. This surge of sayings and traditions wasn't just a ripple; it was a tidal wave crashing against the *Sunnah* itself.

This overwhelming surge of the *Sunnah Qawliyah* over the enduring *Uswah* rattled its very core. Issues once harmoniously agreed upon now sparked fierce debates. Imagine the daily rituals, those acts of worship passed down like cherished heirlooms from one generation to the next, now splintering under the weight of interpretation. Take the prayer, a ritual as rhythmic and regular as the heartbeat, performed five times a day since the Prophet's time. Now, this ritual, once a symphony of unified devotion, faced discord that dissected every note—from the

call to prayer to the final salutations. This stark transformation underscored the profound impact of the Sunnah Qawliyah's ascendancy—a narrative victory that reshaped the contours of Islamic practice and belief.

Those who tout history as the singular wellspring of the Prophet's practices might tell you that the myriad ways of performing prayers are just echoes of his enduring Sunnah—that every nuance of these rituals somehow maps back to him. But that's a stretch, a massive oversimplification. It's like an academic sleight of hand crafted by later scholars to handle the messy tangles that sprang up between Sunnah and history. They were trying to hold the line, to keep the peace among the faithful. Yet, to endorse this narrative both intellectually and historically? That's a no-go. It's not just flimsy; it contradicts the very essence of the Quran, which rails against fracturing faith into factions... {...إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شَيْعَاتٍ} (Al-An'am:159) criticizes those who split their religion into sects.

Today, the landscape of Islamic prayer rituals sprawls wide and diverse. You see the distinctions starkly painted between Shia and Sunni practices, and even within Sunni schools—Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, Hanbali—each threads its own unique pattern of devotion. It's a patchwork quilt of religious adherence where each sect stitches its prayers with subtly different threads. If you tried to pin down exactly how the Prophet Muhammad performed his prayers in his last days, you'd likely find yourself wading through a fog of historical ambiguity. This variance largely bubbles up from the potent brew of the spoken Sunnah (sunnah qawliyah). Imagine if Abu Bakr, who took the lead in prayers during the Prophet's lifetime, had tweaked the ritual even slightly from the Prophet's method—it would have sparked flames of controversy. Should any of the Rightly Guided Caliphs have veered from his path, the annals of history would surely have echoed with these deviations. Yet, in the voluminous accounts of sayings and traditions,

not a whisper of dispute about prayer methods filters through from the companions or the faithful in the Masjid an-Nabawi—the pulsing heart of the Islamic Caliphate. This silence in the historical record suggests a uniformity in practice, unshaken by the quakes of time and interpretation.

Why then, do we find such fractured landscapes of religious rites among different Muslim groups and jurisprudential schools today? From the nuances of Eid and Tashriq's takbirat to the variations in the tashahhud wording, from the debates over pronouncing Bismillah or Ameen aloud to the count of phrases in the call to prayer (iqamah), and even the question of reciting Al-Fatiha behind the imam—each practice splinters further into the doctrines of distinct traditions. If these diversities were indeed rooted in the Prophet's own practices, wouldn't traces of these varied sunnahs have shimmered through amongst his companions? Moreover, within the walls of Masjid an-Nabawi during the companions' era—a time when the mosque served as the nerve center of the Islamic world—there ought to have been a mosaic of these practices, if indeed they were all authentic and recognized sunnah from different periods.

Imam Malik, a towering figure in our sacred history, not just by virtue of his time and place—snug in the heart of Medina—but by his deep dive into the realms of jurisprudence and Hadith, stood apart in his rituals. His prayers didn't dance to the common beats: no clasping hands, no vocal Bismillah, no ceremonial raising of hands (*rafa' yadain*). His salutations marking the end of prayer? A singular, one-sided affair. Even his call to the pre-dawn prayer echoed through the dark, long before light touched the horizon.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Abu Hanifa, his contemporary in time but distant in space, stationed in Kufa, struck a different chord. There, practices varied distinctly from Malik's methods. Yet, despite their variances in the choreography of worship, Malik resisted the push to elevate his Muwatta to the pedestal of definitive

Islamic jurisprudence. Why? Because he sensed that the "spoken Sunnah," which trickled down to him through the sands of time and narrative, shouldn't overshadow the uswah mutawatirah—the continuously lived and breathed example of the Prophet. In Malik's eyes, historical hearsay couldn't hold a candle to the luminous continuity of practiced tradition.

History, in its relentless march, didn't just nudge the Prophet's example—it bulldozed through the rituals of Islamic worship, sparking a crisis not just of practice but of theory. Here's the twist: the spoken Sunnah (Sunnah Qawliyah), once revered as the corrective lens for the Prophet's manifest model (Uswah Mukashafah), instead began to blur the very image it was supposed to sharpen. What was meant to rectify deviations, in effect, wrenched the enduring Sunnah (Uswah Mutawatirah) from its natural alignment. Disputes over how to worship, which prayer style holds true, piled up, driven by an array of competing narratives that sliced through the communal fabric. Jurists and theologians, cornered by these burgeoning splits, opted for an uneasy resolution—declare all varying practices as genuine reflections of the Prophet's Sunnah. It was a defensive move to forestall sectarian finger-pointing. Each difference in ritual, each rift in interpretation, was now draped in the sanctity of the Sunnah, making every disputed practice an equally valid path rather than a divergence. And as for the scholars' own squabbles, their jostling opinions, their clashing reports—they recast these not as confusion but as a high-minded search for doctrinal supremacy.

Imam Shafi'i's relentless insistence on the spoken Sunnah sent ripples through the very framework of the manifest Sunnah, stirring up fierce squabbles over the minutiae of religious practice. This deep dive into doctrinal discord soon screamed for a bridge, a way to reconcile the chasm between the historic record and the articulated Sunnah. Enter Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the later jurists, who pitched the idea that

every tradition, every rite, somehow traces back to the Prophet Muhammad himself—a reconciliation born of necessity. To buttress this mindset, they trotted out examples like the differing practices concerning the recitation of Surah Al-Fatiha behind the imam. According to them, regardless of whether one recites or remains silent, each approach finds its roots among the Prophet's companions, showcasing a spectrum of acceptable devotion.⁷⁰

These crafted narratives, built to buffer the shockwaves of deep-rooted theological disputes, initially seemed to hit their mark. They dialed down the urge to cement any singular historical narrative as the definitive script of Islam, opening up minds to a panorama of historical interpretations. Yet, this makeshift and conciliatory spin on the Prophet's example eventually etched deep marks on the understanding of Sunnah. Stretching Sunnah's definition to encompass the actions of the companions didn't truly sync with the Quran's intent—it singles out Muhammad's way as the eternal blueprint for believers. Moreover, historically, to suggest that the companions clashed over something as fundamental and visibly continuous as prayer is to tread on thin ice—it's less historical fact and more a speculative reach.

Once history gets a nod of trust, backing out isn't just hard—it's practically impossible. When the spoken Sunnah (*sunnah qawliyah*) climbed the ranks to become an unshakeable source of religious authority, equated directly with the words of the Prophet himself, it set the stage where its myriad and sometimes clashing narrations had to be seen through the same lens of legitimacy. This created a peculiar kind of tightrope for scholars, compelling them to maneuver through a minefield of divergent views without dismissing any as outright heresy. Layth bin Saad crisply sums it up: just because a faction of scholars or jurists labels something as permissible or forbidden doesn't mean they view those on the opposite side of the fence as doomed or deviants.⁷¹ Jassas, a titan, or a mujtahid almazhab, in his doctrinal field with

disciples like Shams al-Aimma in tow, tackled the discrepancies stemming from single-reporter hadiths by tossing the ball back in the believers' court—let the Muslims pick and choose, he proposed, because every tradition, in one way or another, finds its roots back to the Prophet.

Jassas spins it this way: the tussles among scholars aren't just a scramble for the Sunnah, but a deeper dive, a hunt for its most sterling version. He throws down this thought: the Prophet wasn't obligated to rank the practices he laid out before his followers—"It was not incumbent upon the Prophet to direct them towards the best of the options he had given them *ليس على النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم توجيههم على الأفضل مما* (خير هم فيه)."⁷² These spins, these self-crafted doctrines to sift through the Sunnah for the ultimate best, brought a fleeting sigh of relief to the historical mess we've been handed. But here's the rub: such maneuvers not only muddied the waters around the Prophet's mission, they basically carved out a forever gig for scholars in the religion game, forever chasing after this elusive "best."

For those who sift through the Sunnah, elevating one practice over another, or for those self-assigned scholars who hunt for the most virtuous tradition, relying solely on the web of history to guide them, they'll find themselves backed into a corner. Their very approach, tangled up in their own spun misinterpretations of history, has effectively shackled them to that same history. Now, for them, unraveling the true essence of the Sunnah becomes a Herculean task, bordering on the impossible. They're left to grapple with the contentious debates among the jurists, trying to pinpoint who really holds the torch of truth. Is it all of them, or just a chosen few?

Revelation has this singular knack—it forges thoughts and philosophies that hover tightly around its own constructed paradigm, a sharply defined circle of divine dictates. Like the scripture says, "{And if it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within

it much contradiction.}" (An-Nisa: 82). Dive into history instead of revelation, and suddenly, you're swimming in a sea of discord and myriad truths—it's inevitable, like gravity. This intellectual chaos, this scattering of thought, we're stuck in it until we can break free from the history that shackles us. The real kicker? The ongoing mental crisis, this clash of tradition versus recorded time, it's locked because we can't stop leaning on ancient wisdom, on interpretations handed down by voices long gone.

Suggesting that "everyone is right" or that every traditional narration represents a legitimate slice of the Sunnah might act as a handy band-aid in a crisis, but to say this represents the stark reality—that all the layers of historical and legal disputes hold equal weight—is a stretch. This approach, championed by the likes of ancient luminaries—Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, Qadi Abu Bakr Baqillani, Abu Yusuf, Muhammad bin Hasan, and Qadi Shuraih⁷³—doesn't just keep revelation on the back burner; it shackles us within the confines of a tradition-laden, history-steeped understanding of Islam. Despite our attempts to break free, we remain trapped in an echo chamber of historical perspectives, which, though rich, often cloud more than clarify.

Untangling the knots history has tied can't really be done by leaning on the thoughts of ancient scholars who got caught in the very mazes they tried to navigate. Nor can the conventional methods of historical analysis muster the might to cut through its own dense layers to reform what's been marred. Trying to fix history using history is like asking shadows to shed light—it's a contradiction in terms. Especially when revered narratives are shackled by hadiths specifically designed to mute any historical questioning. It's a circular guard, a protective moat of doctrines that defy the very idea of scrutiny.

That foreboding hadith we've discussed in earlier pages warns of a daunting future where a well-fed man, seated on his throne, will decree:

"Folks! You must adhere to the Quran; legalize what you find lawful in it and outlaw what you find unlawful."⁷⁴ This stance, according to the hadith, is flawed. But history didn't just stop with proclaiming such narratives to cement its hallowed status and exempt itself from historical scrutiny. It went further by attributing statements to Caliph Umar to justify the existence of Sunnah outside the Quran, such as, "سيكون من بعدهم قوم يكذبون بالرجم وبالدجال وبالشفاعة وبعذاب القبر ويقوم بخرجن من النار" "بعد ما امتحنوا" "There will be people after you who deny stoning, the Dajjal, intercession, the punishment of the grave, and a group that will exit Hell after being purified."⁷⁵

The stark reality is this: the Quran remains silent on issues like stoning, the arrival of the Dajjal, the intricacies of intercession, or the horrors of the grave's punishment. Yet, history has a knack for filling these silences with its own stories, lending undeserved weight to religious elements that find no echo in the Quranic text. This habit of history—bolstering traditions with narratives that extend beyond divine revelation—has also muddled the waters for scholars who might have otherwise critiqued and dissected these accounts with a clear, historical lens. History, fortified against its naysayers, creates a fortress so formidable that it can drive the frustrated to outright rejection—a scene reminiscent of some early successors' (tabe'in and tab' tabe'in) skepticism⁷⁶ or the more radical dismissals by those who adhere strictly to the Quran. Yet, let's not kid ourselves: the chances of history yielding a method from within to reform itself are about as good as finding a snowball in hell.

A history that doesn't even dare to embrace criticism, that flinches and hurls back hadiths like, "After me, many hadiths will be attributed to me. Compare any hadith you hear from me against the Book of Allah. Accept it if it agrees with it and reject it if it contradicts it," تكثّلوكم (') الاحاديث بعدى فما روى لكم حديث عنى فأعرضوه على كتاب الله فما وافقه فاقبلوه وما خالفه فردوه with a casual dismissal, branding them as concoctions of heretics or

Kharijites.⁷⁷ In such a landscape of historical narrative, where scholars and interpreters get so incensed by these rebellious strands of tradition that they declare them anti-Quranic, there—right there—the alleyways of historical reform slam shut. There's no cracking open that door—not with the old keys, not when the guards of orthodoxy are so quick to brand the slightest deviation as heresy.

Reclaiming the Sunnah Echoes from the Forgotten Paths

History is not merely a sequence of events; it's a prism through which we view reality, sometimes murky, sometimes saturated with color, and occasionally clear, but often as narrow as the vision required to see something from a great distance. As humanity's narrative unfolds, it's naturally tinged with the experiences and conceptual frameworks of other cultures, painting a complex tapestry of human understanding. In this light, detaching the Sunnah from the dense web of history is crucial. Only by completely liberating Sunnah from the historical grip can we fully explore the Prophet's practices in all their nuanced glory. More on this method will follow. But for now, suffice it to say that this involves a scenario where history supports rather than just interprets revelation, allowing us to avoid preconceptions and accepted truths in our historical studies. Claiming that there is consensus on the authenticity of the Sahih Sittah or that all variants of Sunnah are legitimate because our forebears thought so is really just a way to shut down debate before it starts.⁷⁸

Revelation, that sacred and untouchable gem, has never been shoved down throats via fatwas or the stampede of religious decrees. Instead, when the Quraysh slung around accusations, branding the Quran as the ramblings of a 'bewitched man,' such claims were not just deflected—they were met with an open invitation to witness the divine sparkle of revelation with wide-open eyes. The revelation itself, in its infinite wisdom, consistently nudges believers toward deep contemplation and observation of the cosmos, inspiring them to reach logical and reasoned

conclusions on their own. So really, if the essence of revelation, untouched and pure, does not succumb to the weight of human opinions or edicts, how can we justify hammering historical perceptions and a mishmash of sayings into the framework of divine wisdom through sheer force of consensus or fatwa? It's a glaring truth that until the Sunnah is completely untangled from the snarls of history, its definitive and actionable authenticity remains up for debate. And here's the kicker: if the six major sunni hadith collections are truly the immortal spring of non-Quranic wisdom, why have certain practices, like the prayer niche or rules of temporary marriage, been shelved by Sunni scholars?

Imam Muslim muses in the preamble to his *Sahih*: even the lips of the virtuous can trip into falsehoods—unintentionally, mind you. Their words may occasionally wander into the wrong alley, but their hearts? Oh, they remain unstained, pure. Yet here's the kicker—we, thumbing through the annals of sayings and traditions, find ourselves hanging onto their every word, banking more on their verbal slips than the pristine chambers of their hearts. To navigate these verbal slip-ups and to reach the benevolence and goodwill of the narrators is to wade through the murky waters of historical accounts. Unlocking the true Sunnah of the Prophet requires that we box history into its rightful place, not let it sprawl unchecked.

Navigating through the narrative missteps of narrators with hearts of gold, and unearthing their true, noble intentions is exactly the journey we need to take to straighten out our crumpled perception of history. On the flip side, to dodge their skewed historical views, to endorse their critiques of history as the ultimate truth, or to declare that every bit housed in the archives of sayings and traditions is spot-on, or to paint the contradictions in historical narratives as various hues of the Sunnah—this, in essence, means turning a blind eye to history. Whether done from a place of sacred fervor or under the sway of conformist

impulses, we can't afford to ignore the fact that the sanctity we've draped over history—as sayings and traditions, then as Sunnah, and eventually as unrecited revelation—is a mantle we've placed ourselves, not one woven by divine revelation. This sanctity is manufactured by history, not birthed by revelation.

Elevating the Sahih Sittah to the stature of "unrecited revelation" wasn't just a whimsical decision; it was a meticulously curated historical act. The principles, the scrutiny, the rigorous validations—they are all conjured up from the depths of human intellect, a testament to our relentless pursuit of understanding. Yet, when history tightens its grip, influencing our grasp of the divine, it should jolt us into questioning whether we've caged revelation within the confines of human constructs. This isn't just about re-evaluating old norms—it's about dismantling the fortresses of tradition that history has enshrined. To critically peer into this sanctified history of Sunnah, we need a deep dive into the very processes that have lulled us into venerating our historical fabrications, making us hostages to the very rules we've established.

We cannot ignore the glaring truth that the collections of hadiths we now revere as the untouchable source of 'unrecited revelation'—to doubt which is to invite accusations of heresy, blasphemy, or outright disbelief—weren't always held in such divine regard. Back in their day, the scripts were subject to intense debate. The Kharijites would scoff at narrations extolling the virtues of the Prophet's family, dismissing them as merely tribal biases, while the Shia would outright reject any that celebrated their rivals. Then came the Mu'tazilites, their intellects marinated in Greek philosophy, shaking the very foundations of theological discourse by denying hadiths about divine attributes. Each faction found their pet narratives, clung to them as gospel truths, and wielded them like weapons in their doctrinal arsenals. And despite the mire of controversy surrounding these hadiths, it never crossed the minds of these fiercely divided groups that those who rejected their

preferred narratives might be anything less than Muslim. No, they never thought to cast them out of the fold of Islam, even as they stood on the battleground of their convictions.

Even as the framework for dissecting and validating hadiths took shape—crystallizing methods to sift the authentic from the fabricated—those dedicated scholars curating their collections hardly entertained the thought that dissenters who didn't endorse their compilations were essentially dissing the Sunnah. Rejecting the Prophet's sayings or shrugging off his traditions? That wasn't even on the table, not in their wildest contemplations. To critique, to call a narration weak, or to dismiss it outright was, in their eyes, to toss aside the narrators themselves. These scholars and their devoted disciples knew all too well: the meticulous business of refining and vetting these narrations was nothing short of a dive into historical nuances—a venture where absolute certainty was a mirage, always tantalizingly out of reach.

The whole science of hadith criticism was a product of the human mind, reflecting the individual historical perspectives of the scholars. Despite piling up evidence to confirm a narrator's honesty, absolute certainty was unattainable. These scholars had no choice but to rely on external historical evidence to gauge the narrators' reliability. The catch? A narrator deemed honest by one scholar could be doubted by another. This discrepancy sowed the seeds of fierce debates among scholars over the trustworthiness of narrators. The inevitable result was a divergence in the authenticity of hadiths: what one scholar accepted as reliable, another dismissed as dubious. These disagreements were a natural outcome of each scholar's unique grasp of history, so they didn't expect universal agreement. Consequently, some collections of hadiths were regarded as more reliable by certain scholars, while others were given the nod by different experts.

To claim definitively that a collection of hadiths is now beyond the reach of critique or amendment flies in the face of the evolutionary

nature of hadith scholarship itself. Even among contemporaries like the venerable authors of the *Sahih Sittah*, there was no uniformity; each delved into their own versions of collections, driven by disparate standards and interpretations of critique. Take Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik, who both saw mursal hadiths as credible—yet, here comes Imam Shafi'i, turning the table with a critical eye sharper than a scalpel, dissecting the chains of narration, casting doubts on their authenticity. His scrutiny didn't just whisper into a void; it echoed, reshaping the bedrock of hadith credibility. Over time, Shafi'i's skepticism wasn't just another opinion—it became the lens through which many later scholars viewed mursal hadiths, relegating the earlier acceptance by giants like Malik and Hanifa to the margins of historical footnotes. Similarly, Imam Malik revered the practices of the people of Medina as inherently valid, seeing them as a community shaped under the direct watch of the Prophet Muhammad himself. He argued that every action in Medina was either directly sanctioned by the Prophet's nod or his consenting silence. Yet, this perspective, drenched in the lore of direct apostolic approval, was ultimately dismissed by later scholars of hadith.⁷⁹

There's a restless debate among scholars about pinning down what an authentic Hadith really is. Imam Muslim plays it loose, willing to connect dots based solely on the slim chance that the narrator might have crossed paths with the source, no need for historical handshakes. Meanwhile, Imam Bukhari demands cold, hard evidence — a real encounter, at least once, to cement the connection. Then there's the issue of bias: some scholars turn up their noses at narrations from those tagged as heretics, while others rail against the notion that a narrator's creed should sway the truth of their words. Thus, in a whirl of doctrinal discord, some daring scholars thread Shia and Kharijite narrations into their texts, stitching a broader tapestry.

From the start, we noted a key spark for the myriad collections of Hadith: scholars can't quite agree on the rules. Those who dive deep

into the evolving history of Hadith can feel the pulse of its gradual sophistication over time. Human knowledge is relentlessly restless, forever trekking towards betterment. We can never plant a flag and declare we've arrived, nor can we assert that the amassed sayings and traditions, shaped under the weight of centuries and the scrutiny of human conditions, have transcended the flaws inherent in their gathering and analysis. It's audacious to claim these human narratives, which merely echo the essence of traditions, have flawlessly captured the Prophet's days in their full spectrum. This is partly because the critical standards we laud as the scholarly height of Hadith scholars don't hold the same sanctity among their contemporary peers.

If the rules of Hadith critique set by the likes of Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifa could be tossed aside by the sharp scrutiny of Imam Shafi'i and later scholars, and if even Bukhari's stringent standards of connectivity could be upended by his own disciple, Imam Muslim, and his circle, then there's absolutely no sin in casting a critical eye on our storied intellectual heritage, centuries down the line. Back in the day, Imam Malik's geographical and temporal closeness to the Prophet's city didn't shield his ideas from robust debate—they weren't seen as betraying the Sunnah. If Malik's portrayal of Sunnah, that Medinan way of life, could be called into question under the harsh light of scholarly arguments, why should we, with centuries more insight and far better tools at our disposal, shy away from a vigorous shake-up of our sanctified past? Especially now, when we stand far removed from the times of Bukhari or Muslim, yet armed with much greater means to probe and question.

The Hadith scholars didn't just lock horns over the nuts and bolts of Hadith; their differences stretched into the narratives of history itself, shaped by the lenses of those who told the tales. History wasn't merely a backdrop; it seeped into the narrators' delivery, tinting the words and meanings of the Prophet. Some demanded their narrators to have a

deep, contextual grasp, while others were swayed by a Hadith that championed free narration, hinting that listeners might grasp the essence better than the storytellers themselves. This clash over narrators has left the Hadith collections in a sort of scholarly limbo, without clear consensus on their credibility. Picture this: Imam Muslim trusted tales from 615 individuals whom Bukhari wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole. Conversely, Bukhari leaned on 434 sources that Muslim wouldn't give the time of day. The result? A fractured legacy where what's considered gold standard by Muslim doesn't even make the cut in Bukhari's book.⁸⁰

The rift between these two eminent Hadith scholars — who not only breathed the same historical air and drew from similar scholarly wells but were also linked as teacher and pupil — pivots on their views about the trustworthiness and criteria for narrators. Their judgments on reliability were precise yet restrictive, meaning their standards for deeming someone credible were fluid and subject to change. Trust isn't a blanket endorsement here; it's not like if someone is deemed trustworthy on one count, they're automatically reliable across the board. Take, for instance, Haytham bin Bushr Wasiti, touted as a disciple of Zahri, both figures well-embedded in Bukhari's narratives. Despite their certified trustworthiness, Bukhari curiously steers clear of using Haytham for any of Zahri's accounts.⁸¹

The shifting sands of opinion on narrators have ignited fierce intellectual clashes over the reliability of traditions. It's these fluid perceptions that account for the sharp divergences in classifying Hadith among scholars. While some might see these changes as a cautious approach, they hardly offer a blanket of reassurance to the learned about the narrators chosen by Bukhari or Muslim.⁸² Instead, the contentious nature of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim remains a historical constant. Abu Umar al-Dimashqi highlights that Bukhari tapped into sources like Ikrimah, Ismail, Asim, and Amr bin Farzdq—figures

previously flagged by earlier scholars for criticism. Similarly, Imam Muslim's use of Suwaid bin Sa'id has stirred objections. Imam Darqutni punches through this narrative with a claim: out of the two Sahihs, two hundred and ten Hadiths are weak—eighty peculiar to Bukhari, thirty to Muslim, and a hundred troubling both texts.

Here's what the scholars of Hadith say about the crème de la crème of Hadith collections. But when it comes to the other four tomes of the famous Six Books, they don't exactly meet the stringent purity standards set by the scholars for authentic Hadith. Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, and Nasa'i are peppered with a mix of good (*hasan*) and weak (*da'if*) Hadiths. Ibn Majah's compendium takes it a step further, presenting a cocktail of every possible flavor—good, fair (*salih*), and downright rejected (*munkar*). Scholars themselves admit that calling these books "Sahih" is a bit of a stretch.

The bedrock upon which the "Sahih Sittah" — the so-called Six Authentic Books — are built isn't celestial but entirely man-made. So, the hallowed status of these tomes is always up for debate, always in the crosshairs of scholarly scrutiny.⁸³ Clinging to the idea that the Sahih Sittah are untouchable and timeless is like trying to freeze history in its tracks — an affront to the natural evolution of intellectual thought. Hafiz Ibn Salah once thundered that the Hadith, once set down by the venerated Sahihain (Bukhari and Muslim), should go unquestioned forever, enshrined as the ultimate truth. But this rigid stance was met with raised eyebrows and shaking heads in the halls of academia.

Darqutni's revisions and Hakim's toil with his Mustadrak are echoes of a time-honored tradition — the relentless scrutiny and questioning by scholars of the works handed down by their forebears. This culture of critique has birthed a robust realization: the early scholars' collections are not immaculate guardians of the principles they themselves penned. To canonize the Sahih Sittah is to deny the very historical dynamism that allowed these collections to be. Bukhari and Muslim wielded their

pens with authority, questioning and vetting the Hadith passed down from earlier generations, deciding what was authentic and what fell short. If they had the liberty to interrogate the past, why should modern scholars be muzzled, denied the same right to question and refine?

How can history just brush aside its own tales that paint a time when the Sahih Sittah weren't yet the crown jewels of Hadith? Before these six famed texts, there were treasure troves of narrations considered even more solid, curated by none other than the likes of Abdullah ibn Masud, Abdullah ibn Umar, Jabir, Abu Hurairah, Anas bin Malik, Abdullah ibn Abbas, and Samurah bin Jundub. There's talk of Abdullah ibn Umar's collection, neatly put together by his pupil Nafi, and Samurah bin Jundub's compilation, credited to his son Sulaiman bin Samurah. These collections, brimming with firsthand accounts from these companions, have supposedly been preserved in current Hadith texts with all their chains intact. Yet, bewilderingly, none of these original goldmines have made it to us in their pure form.⁸⁴ Even more bizarre is how the community has seemingly shrugged off these original, possibly superior caches of the Companions' wisdom, failing to secure them as primary Sunnah sources. Instead, we've elevated the later compilations to sacred status. If the early Muslims had already put the Hadiths in order, why the later scramble to stack and restack them, ensuring each link in the chain was just so? This narrative, if taken as gospel, suggests that the creation of the Sahih Sittah was not just unnecessary but a retrograde maneuver, a scholarly backslide that casts a shadow on the whole historical venture.

It's impossible to ignore how, alongside the rigorous digging and scrutinizing of historical rules and narrator credibility, the less precise, almost whimsical reliance on fame or consensus has been roped in to lend Sunnah its historical heft. Imagine this: yesterday's hearsay, those singularly reported Hadiths, today transform into cornerstone religious sources, just because they've managed to pick up some consensus or

become widely accepted through the relentless march of time. This method births a religion that feels more crafted by human hands than sent from the skies. Here, the foundation isn't divine revelation, but rather the subjective judgments of scholars and the slow, steady evolution of historical consciousness—a man-made faith sculpted not in heaven, but in the dusty archives and lively debates of earthbound scholars.

The label "famous Hadith" straddles the line between narratives whispered by few and those shouted from rooftops, earning their stripes only if they shone during the time of the Successors (Tabi'een) and their direct followers (Tabi' Tabi'een).⁸⁵ This fascination with early acclaim closely mirrors a Jewish tradition, where the lore of the first three generations forms the bedrock of Jewish law. Yet, in the expansive landscape of Islam, shaped by the Quran's vivid declaration, "الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ" (Today, I have perfected your religion for you), this reverence for the initial epochs finds no solid ground. The Quran's words crystalize the faith within the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, leaving us questioning: How can later consensus, a collective nod of agreement from generations far removed from the Prophet's whispers, dare to redefine the bedrock of Islamic belief laid down so clearly in the Quran?

If even the keen insights of the major Companions are overshadowed in the rush to elevate certain Hadiths to the status of popular lore—as some scholars candidly admit—then how can we really trust this later-bestowed fame or consensus? Shah Waliullah dropped a thought-provoking note on this in his reflections on the Sahih collections, pointing out a peculiar instance: a Hadith about dry ablution (tayammum) initially snubbed by Caliph Umar later slipped into wide acceptance, smoothing over any wrinkles of doubt until it gleamed with perceived authenticity.⁸⁶ It seems scholars agree that the community's embrace can transform Hadiths, boosting them from debated texts to pillars of certainty. This intricate dance of acceptance and authority in

shaping what we call the canonization of Hadiths underscores a narrative we can't just gloss over—where historical and religious presumptions play pivotal roles.

In the grand drama of elevating Hadiths above the gritty sands of historical scrutiny, our scholars have often strayed from those very foundational principles that once guided the critical examination and validation of these narratives, turning history into a hallowed ground. By sidelining the rigorous disciplines of scrutiny and verification (*dirayat* and *riwayat*) for a simpler nod to popularity and consensus, we've let irrational tales seep into the bedrock of our religious thinking. This slide into the acceptance of dubious narratives has happened even as our scholars have continuously flagged concerns about certain celebrated, yet essentially solitary (*Ahad*) Hadiths—a caution often whispered but seldom heeded.⁸⁷ The Hadith of Stoning, the Hadith of Dajjal (the Antichrist), and those intriguing narratives about the Prophet Muhammad being bewitched or fundamentally unlettered—these are all *Ahad*, or solitary report, Hadiths. Yet, curiously, the first couple has managed to climb the ladder of popularity, notably linked to Caliph Umar, and the latter tales have nestled into a place of acceptance in the collections of Bukhari and Muslim, ceasing to stir controversy among the faithful. These tales, though now woven into the fabric of communal belief, jarringly clash with the Quranic vision of life. The narrative of the Prophet under a spell, despite its placement in the esteemed *Sahih* texts, has been vigorously challenged by Abu Bakr Jassas, pointing to a schism between revered texts and rational contemplation.⁸⁸ The Hadith that labels the Prophet Muhammad as 'unlettered' shouldn't just ride into significance on the coattails of its inclusion in *Sahih Bukhari* or because it's been clasped to the heart of the community.⁸⁹ If a narrative has risen to prominence through the mists of our collective confusions, it shouldn't be enshrined in our beliefs just because it's become a hit or because everyone seems to agree.

Pulling out the phrase "لا تجمع امتی على الضلالة" (my community will never agree upon an error) to defend this consensus is essentially trying to slap a veneer of historicity on what is really a non-historical basis for understanding. It's like stamping a historical seal on mere popularity. By endorsing this approach, we're essentially tossing aside our critical faculties, losing any nerve we had to sift through history with a discerning eye.



Revitalizing Sunnah Study

A Bold Call to Reclaim the *Uswah*

Whether it's the revered Sahih Sittah or other compilations of prophetic narratives, not even the most venerable Hadith scholars can unequivocally assert that every narrative within these tomes is a verbatim utterance of the Prophet. Nor can they assure us that the narrators' attempts to crystallize the Prophet's days into words are devoid of flaws. The notion that any collection out there could present a complete and untarnished record of the Prophet's Sunnah is a myth. Given the impossibility of capturing every nuance of the Prophet's 23 years, countless sayings and deeds likely slipped through the cracks of history, and it's a mystery how many significant insights were left out by the scholars themselves for not fitting the rigorous scholarly mold.

Take Imam Bukhari, for example. From a staggering pool of about 600,000 Hadiths, he distilled Sahih Bukhari down to roughly 7,000 narratives. Strip out the duplicates, and you're left with about 4,000. Imam Ahmad made similar Herculean cuts for his Musnad, choosing his entries from some 300,000. And Sahih Muslim? Culled from the same daunting figure. This tells us that even the titans of Hadith scholarship were not just scholars—they were sieves of skepticism, painstakingly filtering out the dross to meet exacting standards of authenticity. We've also noted the tragic obscurity of some of Bukhari's collections, once brimming with up to 100,000 Hadiths, now rare relics—a fate shared by many other compilations from that era.

This tells us a couple of stark truths. First, capturing every detail of the Prophet's 23 years was never on the agenda—neither desired nor

feasible. Second, only a handful of the many collections painstakingly assembled by Hadith scholars over the ages have stood the test of time and fame to reach us today. At this point, the biggest trove we have is the Musnad Imam Ahmad, a colossal compilation that attempts to encompass nearly every type of Hadith, yet, along with other Sunan collections, the total barely nudges past 50,000 Hadiths. Some might argue that the vast numbers originally sifted through by scholars were bloated with redundancies, but even so, this doesn't brush away the lingering doubt: these 50,000 Hadiths strung together still fall short of painting a complete, vivid portrait of the Prophet's era. The reality is stark—our grasp on the Prophet's time is less a full panorama and more a fragmentary sketch, pieced together from what has managed to endure the harsh sands of time.⁹⁰

In the volumes penned by Hadith scholars, we sometimes stumble upon references to ancient compilations from the Prophet's era—treasures of wisdom that, sadly, never made it to our time. There's a theory floating around that it was quite the norm back then for old compilations to be swallowed up by newer ones, suggesting that crucial Hadiths from the first and second centuries were seamlessly woven into the fabric of third-century writings. Yet, if this integration had been so complete, Imam Malik's Muwatta wouldn't stand today as a distinct testament to its time. This leads us inexorably to the conclusion that these lost books of sayings and actions were desperate attempts to anchor the fleeting sacred history of a revered era—and nothing else. The Hadith scholars crafted a standard of historical scrutiny so rigorous, so meticulous, that neither the past knew of it nor could the future sustain it. Yet, even their exacting methods couldn't fully conquer the inherent limitations of historical documentation, especially when tasked with capturing an epoch bathed in the direct light of divine revelations. How could any historical narrative hope to fully record such luminescent moments?

The notion of Sunnah as a thread woven through history is actually a fairly new twist in the tapestry of Islamic thought. Nowadays, when we toss around terms like "Kitab and Sunnah," our minds instantly flicker to the Sahih Sittah—the six canonical Hadith compilations that seem to hold all the answers. We reach for these famed texts reflexively, as if they've always been the cornerstone of understanding the Prophet's ways.

But let's rewind to a time before these terms rolled off our tongues, before these collections were even a glimmer in the scholarly eye. Picture the first and second centuries of Islam—what did the quest for Sunnah look like then? Back when no single collection of Hadith was enshrined as "Sahih," and there wasn't a universally endorsed go-to guide among the faithful or the scholars. What were the sources that Muslims turned to in their pursuit of the Sunnah in those days?

Step back into the dusty streets of Medina during the era of the Prophet, a time when the Righteous Caliphs whispered warnings against the avalanche of narrations. They feared the organization of the Prophet's sayings could spiral into something akin to the Mishnah—a structured script that could stiffen the fluid oral traditions. The leading Companions, those venerable figures steeped in wisdom, believed that immersing the faithful in the Quran and steering them away from an obsession with the documented sayings and traditions was not just prudent—it was protective of the faith itself. In such an era, charged with the delicate balance of preservation and innovation, what were the go-to resources or scholars of Hadith deemed essential for those seeking the true Sunnah?

In the society shaped by the Companions, under the meticulous watch of Prophet Muhammad, every corner was steeped in his Sunnah. More than just living by these traditions, there was a steadfast belief that "حسبنا كتاب الله" (the Book of Allah is enough for us). The Quran, a flawless reflection of divine revelation, wasn't just scribbling history

anew in Medina—it was the cornerstone of a radical overhaul. It was this holy scripture that mapped out for the faithful a blueprint for life, restructured under the Prophet's guidance. This wasn't just about living differently; it was about a grand unfolding of life, each new chapter subtly scripted in the verses from above, crafting a narrative of transformation that the believers were not just reading but living out, day by vibrant day.

The Quran was not just a book that rewrote history; it was history's most reliable scribe. If the Prophet's life served as the ultimate exemplar for Muslims, each facet of this exemplary path was illuminated through the divine revelations that shaped it. For those who lived close to the Prophet's time, who saw firsthand how he wove the revelations into the very fabric of his life, making the Quran the definitive chronicle of his ethos and virtues, there was never any reason to stray. Why would they need to sift through histories and anecdotes when they had direct access to the divine script itself?

The stark reality is that we haven't quite figured out where traditions, Hadiths, and narrations fit within the vast expanse of Muslim thought. We can't just elevate these texts to stand as an alternate revelation alongside the Quran—that would only cast shadows of doubt over the clear-cut divinity of the Quran itself. At the same time, it's not right to write off this rich heritage as some sort of foreign plot. These two extremes are just that—extremes, tugging at the edges of a much more nuanced debate that's still unfolding.

First off, there's a notable fixation on the number of non-Arab scholars among the compilers of Hadiths, leading some to proclaim that most scholars, especially those behind the revered Sahih Sittah, aren't of Arab descent. The argument spirals into claims that these scholars have either led the community astray from the Quran or, at the very least, made our grasp of the Quran inextricably tied to these collections of traditions and narrations. Thus, a narrative emerges, painting the Sahih

Sittah as some grand non-Arab conspiracy against the Quran. But let's be clear: this conspiracy theory is a cocktail of historical misunderstanding mixed with a hefty dose of oversimplification of what's actually a labyrinthine issue. Those quick to chalk up the community's deviations and decline to either external or internal conspiracies are missing a crucial piece of the puzzle: conspiracies don't just take root unless the ground is ripe for them. This fertile ground, which ostensibly steers history on its supposed 'predetermined' course, is really the endgame of intricate processes fermenting within our collective psyche. Blaming these deep-seated dynamics on a conspiracy might feel satisfying, it might even let us point fingers at the so-called 'others,' but it's a shallow dive. It skirts around the real issues, leaving us floundering with misconceptions rather than paving the way to truly effective solutions.

It's undeniable—all the luminaries behind the Sahih Sittah hailed from non-Arab roots, and the shaping of these pivotal Hadith collections unfolded in a time and place far removed from Medina's heartbeat. Even giants like Al-Zuhri, revered as a foundational pillar in the Hadith field, whose contributions saturate any serious collection, were not woven from Medina's fabric but were instead outsiders within their own land, linked to the non-Arab Zahra tribe. This truth crystallizes a broader narrative: the volumes we hold as the gold standard of 'unrecited revelation'—terms our jurists fondly use—are deeply indebted to the intellectual labor of non-Arab scholars. Their thoughts and theological rigor are imprinted on every page of these collections. Yet, if we pivot and view these monumental efforts through the proper lens of history, placing them within the broader tapestry of Islamic culture, the specter of a 'non-Arab conspiracy' starts to dissipate. Understanding this context doesn't just demystify—it enlightens, showing us how integral these so-called outsiders were in crafting a legacy that would define centuries of Islamic scholarship.

First off, it's entirely natural for scholars immersed in non-Arab cultures to bring a vibe starkly different from their Arab counterparts. It's about the small things—those cultural nuances so ordinary to those born into them that they scarcely merit a second thought. But to outsiders, these aren't just mundane trivialities; they are keys to a richer, deeper cultural treasure chest. Non-Arab thinkers, with their uniquely shaped intellectual contours, are not just noticing these differences; they are meticulously cataloging and preserving them with a level of precision and sensitivity that might elude those within the Arab academic milieu. Then, there's an aspect that the standard, often narrow historical lens tends to overlook: While the Hadith scholars were deep in the throes of compiling these monumental collections, they were aware they were making history. What they couldn't possibly foresee was how these tomes would ascend to a quasi-divine status, held in reverence just shy of the Quran itself, perceived by later generations as nothing short of an alternate divine revelation.

In the vast tapestry of Hadith history, Bukhari emerges as nothing short of a revolutionary. Before him, the realm of traditions and narrations was devoid of the kind of intellectual rigor, scholarly precision, historical acuity, and editorial prowess that he brought to the table. Bukhari crafted a tome that serves as a lifeline on all life's facets, weaving sayings and actions of the Prophet with the sacred threads of Quranic verses opening almost every section. This wasn't just scholarly work; it was a burst of genius previously unimagined. Bukhari's ambitions soared beyond merely assembling a comprehensive reference; he tapped into the deepest wells of research, leveraging every available resource of his era with a zeal that bordered on the devout. Sahih Bukhari transcended the typical boundaries of scriptural compilations, evolving into a meticulously structured guide accessible to anyone in search of divine guidance. Every chapter began with a Quranic verse, setting the stage for the most authentic sayings and actions of the

Prophet that followed. This wasn't just about compiling knowledge; it was about creating an encyclopedia of faith—a repository where the quest for truth could be nourished by both the divine revelations of the Quran and the thoroughly vetted traditions of the Prophet.

Bukhari poured his heart into crafting *Al-Jami al-Sahih*, a monumental endeavor that consumed sixteen years of his life—a biography in dedication. Yet, even with all his meticulous toil and profound contemplation, parts of his grand blueprint remained starkly blank. Some chapters, set up with the hope of being filled with pertinent narrations and traditions, echoed empty. This incomplete sketch of what was meant to be an encyclopedic tome of jurisprudence was not just a shortfall; it was a beckoning. It hinted at a future where scholars and thinkers might take his preliminary outline and flesh it out into comprehensive guides of their own. And the academic world did not disappoint. Bukhari's most distinguished pupil, Imam Muslim, not only picked up where his mentor left off but advanced a step further, curating another anthology that would come to be revered as *Sahih Muslim*.

Besides Bukhari's groundbreaking work, his disciples like Tirmidhi and Nasai also carved out their own niches within the revered *Sahih Sittah*. Yet, even as their works gained prominence, they didn't quite match the rigorous standards of scrutiny and critical analysis Bukhari had set. Today, the collections we recognize as the *Sahih Sittah* are celebrated more for their editorial prowess than their unimpeachable accuracy. This categorization of the six books as the epitome of reliability isn't something handed down from the divine, nor is there a consensus among Hadith scholars to universally acknowledge all of them, including Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Majah, and Abu Dawood, as purely authentic. Indeed, the label "*Sahih Sittah*" is used somewhat liberally in scholarly circles. It's a bit of a catch-all, with some scholars tossing in texts like *Muwatta* by Malik and *Sunan al-Darimi*, while

others advocate for the inclusion of other well-known books. The term has become a kind of scholarly shorthand, a loose confederation of respected works rather than a rigidly defined group.

There's a kind of myth that wraps the Sahih Sittah in a nearly celestial aura, suggesting these collections are barely a whisper away from divine revelation itself. This view seduces those entrenched in the veneration of ancient texts, but here's the kicker: even the scholars, the stewards of Hadith, haven't reached a consensus on which six books truly deserve this hallowed designation. Beyond the towering bastions of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, the other so-called Sunan are littered with narrations that wouldn't pass a rigorous truth test. And let's not even start on Bukhari, which, for all its storied perfection, includes tales that jarringly clash with the documented rails of history and the strict protocols of Hadith science. Yet, in some circles, Bukhari's *Al-Jami al-Sahih* is exalted as "أَصْحَى كِتَابٍ بَعْدَ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ"—the most authentic book after the Book of Allah. This isn't just elevating a monumental scholarly endeavor to the realms of the sacred; it's an outright snub to the rich tapestry of culture and history that scaffolded such intellectual feats. It's a blinkered adulation that glosses over the intricacies, the contextual dance of knowledge and time that truly shape our understanding of Bukhari's legacy.

Bukhari, the intellectual giant whose "*Al-Jami al-Sahih*" is revered almost like a direct echo of divine revelation, didn't see all his works bask in the same sacred limelight. Numerous compilations of hadiths crafted by various scholars have vanished into the whirlwind of time, including some of Bukhari's own that should arguably be among the best resources for hadith. Take, for instance, Bukhari's "*Kitab al-Hibah*" (The Book of Gifts), which was so encompassing that his scribe, Muhammad Ibn Hatim, pointed out its unrivaled depth compared to works by Waqi, Jarrah, and Abdullah ibn Mubarak on the subject. Where Waqi's book had a meager two or three elevated hadiths and

Abdullah ibn Mubarak's a scant five, Bukhari's tome boasted a staggering five hundred. And it doesn't stop there—other Bukhari masterpieces like "Al-Musnad Al-Kabir," "Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir," "Kitab Al-Raqqaq," "Kitab Dua'fa Al-Kabir," and "Qudaya Al-Sahaba Wa Al-Tabi'een" survive only as whispers in the annals of history, their contents lost to the ages, leaving us grasping at the tales of their once-great existence.

Allama Ibn al-Malqin, a scholar deeply entrenched in the mysteries of Bukhari, let slip a rather astonishing bit of trivia: Imam Abi Sa'd Ismail ibn al-Qasim al-Bushihi once mentioned that Imam Bukhari had crafted a colossal tome of hadiths, a staggering one hundred thousand strong. *ومن الغريب ما في كتاب الجهر بالبسملة لابي سعد اسماويل بن ابي القاسم البوشيهي عن "البخاري انه صنف كتاباً فيه مائة ألف حديث*. It's not just Bukhari who's notable here; think about the myriad masterpieces by intellectual titans like Abdullah ibn Mubarak and Imam Sufyan al-Thawri—treasures once etched into the memories of their disciples, now vanished like whispers in the wind. The annals of Kashf al-Zunun barely clutch onto their names, a ghostly roll call of the vanished. Yet, here's the kicker: the disappearance of these monumental collections doesn't make a dent in the integrity of Islam. If the obliteration of Bukhari's behemoth collection doesn't shake the religion's foundations, why on earth should any other collection be deemed a mandatory vein of religious essence, without which Islam supposedly couldn't be understood or practiced?

Elevating Bukhari's work to "the most authentic book after the Book of Allah" taps into more than just scholarly rigor—it's about the dreams that connect directly back to the Prophet himself. Chapter three unfurls the narrative on how some used dreams as a scaffold to prop open the doors to prophecy, dubbing it the forty-sixth fragment of prophethood. When dreams snagged a parallel lane next to revelation, it paved a seductive path: a way to sanctify favorite texts under the guise of divine insight—a decidedly unacademic method, soaked in mysticism.⁹¹

Bukhari's enthusiasts didn't just use this path; they turned it into a superhighway of sanctification, crafting a celestial legitimacy that blurred lines between divine revelation and human scholarship. In dreams deeply dipped in the divine, Imam Bukhari finds himself trailing directly behind the Prophet Muhammad. Imagine the scene: with every stride, the Prophet lifts his foot, and like a shadow, Bukhari steps precisely where the Prophet's foot once was. It's not just Bukhari who's caught in this celestial choreography. Najm bin Fazil recounts a nocturnal vision where the Prophet steps out from his grave, and there's Bukhari, right behind him, matching his steps in the sand. And then there's Abu Zaid Marwazi, cradled between the Station of Abraham and the Black Stone, caught up in a dream of his own. In his slumber, he hears the Prophet's voice, "O Abu Zaid, why persist with Shafi'i's book when mine is before you?" Baffled, Abu Zaid inquires, "Which book, O Messenger of Allah?" And the reply echoes through the dream, clear and sharp: "Al-Jami' al-Sahih by Muhammad ibn Ismail."⁹²

The crafting of Bukhari's collection transcended mere scholarly endeavor; it verged on the divine, painted in dreams and confirmed through the celestial nudges of istikhara prayers. Each hadith Bukhari chose was a gem he plucked only after ceremonial ablutions and heartfelt prayers, securing only those narrations that resonated with his soul. This was no ordinary diligence—it was an exercise steeped deeply in the sacred traditions and the cultural DNA of devout scholars.⁹³ Beyond mere human memory, the legends surrounding the compilers of the Sahih Sittah speak of mental prowess so vast, so deep, it's as if history itself had never dared to dream up such minds before. These scholars, armed with divine-like intellects, held the whispers of centuries in the vaults of their minds, selecting with surgical precision only the most pristine from a sea of hundreds of thousands.

Imagine a world where being recognized as a Hafiz al-Hadith meant you could recite at least one hundred thousand hadiths, and sometimes

as many as three hundred thousand, as casually as one recites their own name. Bukhari, whose "Sahih al-Bukhari" is said to distill the essence of six hundred thousand narrations, once confessed to retaining three hundred thousand hadiths—only a third deemed flawless (احفظ مائة ألف) ⁹⁴. حديث صحيح ومائة ألف غير صحيح This staggering number was no exception; it was the standard.

Let's picture this: Imam Ahmad and Imam Muslim, sifting through three hundred thousand hadiths to compile their revered texts. It's not just about selecting; it's about holding these narratives in the vaults of their memory, three hundred thousand echoes of the Prophet's words. Imagine the scale of their mental landscape—vast, almost mythical. To be dubbed a Hafiz al-Hadith, a scholar needed to memorize these stories not by the dozens, not even by the hundreds, but by the hundreds of thousands. Now, take Abu Zur'ah—his collections might be lost to time, but the tales linger on about his staggering recall of seven hundred thousand hadiths.

To be dubbed a complete hadith scholar, the bar is ostensibly set sky-high: memorize a staggering three hundred thousand hadiths or emulate Abu Zur'ah, who reportedly held seven hundred thousand in the vault of his mind. Such claims not only paint a portrait of extraordinary, almost mythical memory prowess but also insinuate a level of historical and spiritual acumen that transcends the ordinary. If we buy into this narrative, these scholars aren't just men; they're near-mythic figures, whose works should be seen not as mere scholarly endeavors but as the output of superhuman intellectual force. However, if you peel back the layers of these lofty pronouncements, often repeated throughout our historical texts, a closer inspection might reveal cracks in the façade. Perhaps these tales of mnemonic might are not as ironclad as they're made out to be, suggesting a need for a more grounded approach in evaluating the legends of hadith scholarship.

Think about this: Imam Bukhari is credited with memorizing a staggering three hundred thousand hadiths. If we peel back the layers of awe and examine this claim through a lens tinged with skepticism—like that surrounding Abu Zur'ah's supposed memorization of seven hundred thousand hadiths—it seems less like historical fact and more like an urban legend of scholarly feats. The notion that one could flawlessly retain three hundred thousand hadiths defies every shred of common sense about human memory, especially when you consider the mental gymnastics needed to keep straight the endless repeat of words, names, and sequence of narrators.

Now, paint this picture: If we were to lay out these three hundred thousand hadiths, we'd need about one hundred and twenty tomes, assuming each volume has five hundred pages with five hadiths per page. This sprawling textual universe is so vast that if true, it would make Bukhari not just a scholar but a supernatural savant. Similarly, the figure for Abu Zur'ah would translate into about two hundred seventy-five volumes. The thought of someone keeping such an expansive library perfectly organized in their brain is more fantastical than factual—a mythic scale of memory that history neither confirms nor practical experience supports.

No matter how much hyperbole is thrown around about the Arab knack for memorization—those tales of them recalling their camels' ancestries or whatever—that doesn't make such myths any less fabulous. Then there are historians who laud the phenomenal memory of Bedouin Arabs as evidence of the hadith scholars' prowess, conveniently forgetting that nearly all of these scholars hailed not from the deserts of Arabia but from non-Arab lands.⁹⁵ It's curious, really. And there's more: think about Abu Bakr Siddiq, a man of considerable repute and one of the earliest converts, who was immensely close to the Prophet. It's said he compiled a collection of around five hundred hadiths but later destroyed it, haunted by the fear that maybe, just maybe, something in

there wasn't actually said by the Prophet or was misunderstood. Now, pause and reflect: Abu Bakr fretted over the accuracy of just five hundred hadiths—a collection bolstered by written notes. Yet, we're supposed to believe that centuries later, scholars' memories turned into these vast, infallible vaults capable of flawlessly holding three hundred thousand hadiths?

Bukhari, whose *Sahih al-Bukhari* would one day be venerated as the ultimate codex of the Sunnah, wasn't exactly haloed in sanctity during his own era. No, he was very much human, embroiled in the cutthroat academic squabbles that define any scholarly community. His opinions clashed—sometimes spectacularly—with those of his peers and even his mentors, carving out a niche of fervent followers and fierce detractors. This was a man enmeshed in the world of hadith, where life revolved around the transmission, study, and exegesis of the Prophet's sayings. Into this arena stepped Imam Muhammad ibn Yahya al-Dhuqli, a giant of the age and both a fellow student of Bukhari's and Imam Muslim's mentor. Their fallout over the creation of the Quran—al-Dhuqli's hardline insistence that it was uncreated, and that anyone who thought otherwise was beyond the pale—slammed into Bukhari's standing. His stature took such a hit that, despite his profound scholarship, only his loyal student Imam Muslim remained by his side as a figure of note.⁹⁶

While Bukhari's knack for organizing the chaotic cosmos of hadith solidified his scholarly street cred as time unfurled, his influence far surpassed just another footnote in history. Unlike his contemporaries, whose teachings vanished as whispers in the wind when they passed, Bukhari's compilation, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, not only preserved his voice but gradually cemented its place as an essential wellspring of Hadith and traditions. In time, it wasn't just a book; it became a beacon, drawing scholars to pen extensive commentaries and setting a gold standard in the field, heralding it as more pristine and authentic than any of its counterparts, a veritable encyclopedia of the 'unrecited revelation'.

However, it's a romantic fallacy, really, to believe Bukhari's revered status was a divine choreography, or that he was some celestial appointee safeguarded to keep the Sunnah from slipping into the sands of time, as dream interpreters would have us believe. Nor is it grounded in any slice of reality to claim that the Muslim community, right after his opus hit the shelves, universally hailed it as 'the most authentic book after the Book of Allah' during his era. Such a narrative, spun from the threads of wishful thinking rather than the sturdy yarn of historical evidence, is just that—a myth, not the manuscript of history.

Conclusion

By transforming history into a hallowed lens through which divine revelation is interpreted, we haven't just obscured the message—we've entangled our future. This veneration of the past has turned understanding and reclaiming what lies ahead into a formidable challenge, deepening the murk that once yielded to clarity. The compilations of sayings and traditions didn't merely safeguard revelations; frankly, they erected monumental barriers on our path forward. By restricting our grasp of the divine, we've effectively dethroned ourselves from spiritual leadership. These narratives have blurred more than just historical facts—they've woven a dense web of cynicism over our future prospects. Consider the saying "بدأ الإسلام غريباً" (Islam began as something strange and will end up strange again)—this isn't merely a reflection; it's a deliberate chant of doom, designed to sow seeds of doubt and despair about what's to come. Moreover, the grim prophecy that the society established by Prophet Muhammad would disintegrate within three decades isn't just an observation—it's pessimism turned into an offensive weapon, a deliberate despair aimed directly at the heart of our hope.⁹⁷

Rediscovering divine revelation is essentially our manifesto for the future, yet it demands that we confine history to its rightful bounds. Take the directive from the hadith "لا تكتبوا عني" (Do not write anything from me), which bans the transcription of hadiths while permitting their oral transmission, conditioned by a stern warning: "من كذب علي متعداً فليتبوا مقعده في النار" (Whoever intentionally lies about me should prepare his place in the fire). This isn't just a guideline; it's a severe caution,

striving for a balance to ensure history is handled with care, preserving its integrity against distortions.

As we delve into history purely as history, it illuminates our path. But the moment it ascends to the pedestal of the sacred, untouchable and beyond critique—almost like a divine revelation—things start to get tangled. The history of revered eras, viewed just as history, is complex; many have strayed for lesser reasons. The allure of the Sunnah, the way of the Prophet, is undeniable. Yet, this affection should not obstruct our ability to critically analyze and dissect the hadiths. History teaches us to tread this delicate line cautiously, to avoid the pitfalls that have ensnared those before us.

In trying to navigate the nuances of history, we must avoid the dramatic overreaches our ancestors often embraced concerning the Sunnah. History isn't a platform for cultish myths or a minefield dense with the debris of doctrinal bias. It is neither a sacrosanct artifact imbued with divine quality, where external critiques are misinterpreted as attacks on Islam itself. Succumbing to such distortions only spins us deeper into the intellectual quagmires crafted by those before us—an inheritance of confusion we are better off without.⁹⁸ The collections of sayings and traditions—the hadiths—do not stand as some unrecognized form of divine revelation, and not even the scholars who assembled these texts entertained such notions. Nor should this vast historical resource, rigorously compiled through critical analysis, be dismissed as trivial. History, no matter how validated, cannot be transmuted into a divine guidebook. Yet, the undeniable truth remains: a society blind to the subtexts of its past will stumble blind into its future. Those professing allegiance to the Quran, or dubbed as deniers of hadith, stumbled fundamentally. They recoiled so vehemently from certain dubious and misleading statements in the narrations that they lost the fortitude to read between the lines—where truth often resides in whispers. Conversely, those who anointed every conflicting narration

as an enduring source of divine insight, merely due to their linkage in a chain of transmission, found themselves caged within the constructs of their own misunderstandings. Enclosed within their self-erected labyrinth, they were forced into a corner, claiming all divergent statements about the Sunnah, variously attributed to the Prophet Muhammad across time, must concurrently be correct. Yet, they overlooked that such proclamations not only counter history but also plunge us into a dense fog regarding the abandoned practices of the Sunnah. Some have interpreted these differences as a rich diversity, celebrating them as a divine grace.⁹⁹ Others, noting the companions' unease with agreement, saw their disputes not as flaws but as serendipitous cracks, opening a spectrum of practices for the community to adopt from varied traditions.¹⁰⁰ We've intentionally turned a blind eye to the histories of past nations who, dealing with diversity and oral revelations, erected grand edifices of jurisprudential thought. These towering constructs, ultimately, dimmed the fundamental tenets of divine directives, transforming a broad field of actions into a playground where sacred duties were sidelined for human whims.

Venturing into the complexities of history becomes an arduous trek when that history is revered almost as divine revelation. Yes, we're in dire need of revising the very rules we use to scrutinize history. The foundational principles underpinning our hadith collections are sturdy, sure, but to argue that they're beyond refinement isn't just an affront to human intellect—it's like deliberately ignoring the ongoing divine revelations that continuously enhance the universe. Every moment is thrumming with divine intent, pushing us toward greater enlightenment, and to overlook this dynamic is to dodge the core of progress itself.

Now, consider the process hinted at by "فيكون"—if it's still in motion, how can we possibly conclude that the narrative is complete, or that our

understanding of history has reached its zenith just as our predecessors did? Let's cut through the pretense: nothing short of divine revelation itself can be deemed the ultimate word on knowledge. And when it comes to critiquing hadith, we're far from settling the scores—particularly with those solitary reports whose definitive value is still up for heated debate.

Daring to decipher the subtleties hidden between the historical lines, those brave enough recognize that history can never ascend to the status of divine source. Yet, this doesn't diminish its power to shed light on the winding paths of religious interpretation. The role of sayings and traditions is to offer a nuanced perspective on understanding divine messages—a mission that calls for moderation rather than sanctification.

But here's the rub: if we're going to engage with this sanctified version of history responsibly, we must critically reassess the accepted canons of hadith. It's about consistency. We agree that singular reports cannot establish doctrines, just as we concede that the Quran remains inviolable, unalterable. So why should we endow these same solitary narrations with the authority to dictate the delicate nuances of religious interpretation?

We need to pause and reflect with a cool head. Consider this: in personal affairs where stakes are high—like deals or last wills—the Quran insists on the testimony of two witnesses. But when the situation escalates to community or household issues, such as in cases of slander, the bar rises—the script demands four witnesses.

In scenarios where someone's presence isn't possible, rather than relying on mere suspicion, conjecture, circumstantial evidence, or simple testimony, we turn to oaths and mutual cursing (لعن). When the stakes are even higher, touching upon matters of faith and prophethood, it can escalate all the way to the dramatic spectacle of mutual invocation of curses (مبابلة). The principle is clear: the greater the

importance of the matter or the wider its impact, the stricter the standard of evidence becomes.

No matter how trustworthy a person's testimony or confession through oath or mutual cursing (لعان) might be, it cannot be considered the ultimate source of religious law or interpretation. For that, it is essential for an entire generation to bear witness to the next, as stated in the Quran: ﴿وَكَذِّلَكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسُطْلَانًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ...﴾ (البقرة: ١٤٣) "And thus We have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people..." (Al-Baqarah: 143).

Whatever was transmitted from the Prophet to the community, including divine revelation, it is now the responsibility of the entire community to pass it on as witnesses to others. This transmission occurs generation after generation, from one group to another. Alongside the transmission of the Book and divine revelation, the understanding and interpretation of these revelations must also be passed down. This is the authentic divine method, where a large number of people collectively transmit the example of the Prophet from one generation to the next, leaving no room for khabar aha'd, solitary reports or doubt.

The profound grasp of the Prophet's ways, the Sunnah Mutawatirah, bestowed upon the "Ummat Wasat" — the exemplary Middle Nation acting as the world's witnesses — isn't entangled in obscurity. For the scholars of hadith, these practices aren't just historical entries to be archived in the dusty tomes of time. No, this is a vibrant continuum, a baton of tradition and truth energetically passed down through generations. What we're handing down through the generations isn't merely a collection of sterile rituals; it's a living tradition imbued with spiritual depth, aloof from trivial debates about its outward precision.

Venturing into the depths of history to uncover the Sunnah, however, binds us to the interpretations of historians and narrators.

Despite their immense scholarly prowess and deep religious insight, they can only push historical understanding as far as their personal perceptions allow.¹⁰¹ While the Sunnah remains tethered to inherited revelation, history gives birth to extrascriptural sources about the Sunnah. Here, the notion of Hadith Qudsi has spurred the emergence of a 'Quran outside the Quran'—a murky realm straddling history and revelation.

This relentless quest to unearth God's words in historical records, far beyond the Prophet's sayings, has spawned significant misconceptions about both the Sunnah and divine revelation itself. When history ascends to a level where it can extract divine revelations beyond the Prophet's era, the emergence of an independent religious concept is inevitable. Today, our realm is saturated with *kitabul fazael*, these 'kitabul amani,' rivaling the Book of Allah—this is no coincidence. If concocted virtues of Quranic chapters have managed to sideline the Quran's intended functions, it traces back to history's expanded, extrascriptural role.

The notion that the Sunnah represents unrecited revelation, or that hadith books are secondary religious texts, is simply a rationalization, an apologetic plea. In reality, these hadith collections have solidified their place to such a degree that they no longer require confirmation from divine revelation. If the 'kitabul amani,' books filled with desires and hadiths, did not have their distinct established status, there would be no rationale for every sect in the community to have its preferred source of unrecited revelation, deeming it adequate for their doctrinal bases. This reliance is evident within the Sunni tradition with its six authentic books or nine books, and within the Shia tradition with their four key texts: *Al-Kafi*, *Man la yahduruhu al-Faqih*, *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, and *Nahj al-Balagha*. This dependence ought to be seen in this context.

Think about Bayazid Bastami, who spent his life dodging melons—not because he didn't like them, but because he couldn't figure out how

Prophet Muhammad ate them. This fixation on mirroring every minutiae of the Prophet's life embodies a sort of fanaticism to the Sunnah that borders on the theatrical. It's a craving for historical authenticity that can only be quenched by diving deep into the annals of history. For those who elevate such precise emulation of the Prophet's everyday actions to the level of religious duty, it's a stark wake-up call: these once-vivid traditions and their physical expressions have long since drifted into the realm of the bygone.

Forget about how Bayazid Bastami approached his melons. Today, we can't even definitively state how the Prophet performed his last prayer—whether the call to prayer (*iqamat*) included one or two *Takbirs*, whether the '*Ameen*' was said aloud or quietly, if the followers were allowed to recite *Surah Fatiha* or not, whether raising of the hands (*raf'ul yadayn*) was discontinued or maintained, whether the hands were tied during the standing posture or left apart, and whether the salutation at the end was turned to one side or both. Thus, for those whose concept of Sunnah is merely a collection of rituals or outward practices, they should realize that these compilations of sayings and traditions cannot aid in rediscovering the Sunnah. However, for those who find sufficiency in following the example of the Prophet rather than just the rituals, the eternal source of this example, the Glorious Quran, still exists in all its original glory and detail.

The End

Notes & References

¹ The Quran highlights the deviation of the People of the Book by stating, "They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah" (At-Tawbah: 31).

² This critique reflects concerns similar to those Jesus expressed about the Pharisees and Sadducees, as mentioned in Matthew 15:6 and Luke 11:46, 52, among other verses. He criticized their legalistic interpretations of the law, which complicated simple acts of worship and introduced unnecessary rigidity.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were also accused of failing to adhere to the directive in the Torah, as stated in Deuteronomy 4:2: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, to keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." This led to a situation where religious leaders imposed human interpretations on divine commands, thus complicating the relationship between the followers and their faith. Consequently, in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus targeted the static and soulless approach of the Jewish scholars, aiming to refocus on the spirit rather than the letter of the law.

³ Tabaqat Ibn Saad, Volume 5, Page 140, published in Europe

⁴ Mukhtasar Jami' Bayan al-Ilm, Page 175. Tazkirat al-Huffaz, Volume 1, Page 7

⁵ Tazkirat al-Huffaz, Volume 1, Page 7

⁶ For more details, see: Tojih al-Nazar ila Usul al-Athar by Sheikh Tahir bin Saleh al-Jaza'iri, Pages 18-20

⁷ Dhahabi, Tazkirat al-Huffaz, Volume 1, Page 7

⁸ Tojih al-Nazar, op. cit.,

⁹ The stories we hear about some of the Prophet's companions—tales of lost collections of hadiths that never made their way to us—stir something deep. They remind us that not every whispered word has woven itself into the fabric of our faith, and really, that's okay. Maybe these collections were never penned at all. When the Quran itself lays down a line in the sand

with its prohibitive commands, and the Prophet Muhammad explicitly tells his followers not to immortalize his sayings in writing, you've got to wonder: was there ever room for compiling these oral traditions into text? Imagine the scene: the luminous epoch of a great era, the charged atmosphere of the Prophet's gatherings—there's a palpable urge to document everything, to capture the fleeting moments. This urge strikes Caliph Abu Bakr, who goes as far as gathering about 500 hadiths. But then, a pause, a step back: he's haunted by the future, by the possibility of today's straightforward history morphing into tomorrow's sacred scripture. And so, he holds off, his project shelved.

Caliph Umar steps into this narrative with a similar thread of caution, shaped by consultations and an echo of Abu Bakr's restraint. He doesn't just stop at shelving; he destroys the collection. This consensus among the companions, a shared nod to not lock down the fluidity of hadiths into the rigidity of history, speaks volumes. Against the backdrop of the Quran's clear verses, like a beacon: "يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُم مِّنْ رِبِّكُمْ وَشَفَاءٌ لَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًىٰ" (Yā ayyuhā an-nāsū qad jā'atkum maw'idhatun min rabbikum wa shifa'un limā fi as-sudūri wa hudan wa rāḥmatun lil-mu'minīn. Qul bi-faḍlī Allāhi wa bi-rāḥmatihī fa-bi-dhālikā falyafrahū huwa khayrun mimmā yajma'ūn - Quran 10:57), the idea that some companions would go rogue and compile anyway seems, at best, far-fetched.

¹⁰ Sahih Bukhari, Chapter on the Prayer of Voluntary (Nafl) Prayers in Congregation

¹¹ Abu Dawood, Kitab-al-Ilm

¹² Abdul Salam Mubarakpuri, Seerat Bukhari, Patna 1329 Hijri, Volume 2, Page 27

¹³ It is reported that Caliph Umar, in a decisive act to prevent the writing of Hadiths, burned the manuscripts people had compiled. He issued a stern warning: "People, do you also want to create a 'Mishnah' like the People of the Book?" Similarly, Caliph Ali was extremely cautious about the accuracy of the Prophet's sayings. Whenever he heard someone relay a Hadith, he

insisted they swear to its truthfulness. In one speech, he urged his audience to destroy any written Hadiths they possessed, cautioning that previous communities had been destroyed for prioritizing the teachings of their scholars over the direct word of God.

Abu Nadrah once questioned Abu Sa'id al-Khudri about the propriety of writing down the Hadiths he narrated, to which he responded, "Do you want to make them into a *Mushaf*?" suggesting a reluctance to elevate these writings to the status of the Quranic text.

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud was particularly stringent in his opposition to recording Hadith. When presented with a collection, he burned it, declaring, "I implore you by Allah, anyone who has such writings should inform me, so I can address them." He reasoned that past communities had perished because they immersed themselves in scholar-made collections and overlooked God's Book.

This strict stance against the transcription of Hadith is also reflected in historical accounts of Abdullah ibn Abbas and Abdullah ibn Umar. Well beyond the companions' era, Muslims were generally opposed to the idea of writing down Hadiths. Prominent scholars like Alqama, Sha'bi, Masruq, Qasim, Mughira, and Amash resisted it, fearing that excessive reverence for the Prophet's era and deep emotional attachment to his life and teachings might lead future generations to treat these records as sacred, creating a new '*Mishnah*'.

¹⁴ Bukhari

¹⁵ To navigate the shifting perceptions of history, Islamic scholarship adopted two key approaches. Firstly, there was a rigorous critique and evaluation of hadiths to ensure they withstood academic scrutiny. Secondly, the acceptance of hadiths was contingent on their alignment with the overarching framework of Islam. Abu Yusuf outlined these criteria in his seminal work, "*Al-Radd 'ala Siyar al-Awza'i*." As the doctrine of *Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* became more widely accepted, interpretations of hadiths like ("Whoever deviates, deviates into the fire")

were framed within this broader, established understanding, reflecting a more nuanced approach to religious texts.

¹⁶ Historians commonly note that before converting to Islam, Tamim al-Dari was a storyteller. Following his conversion, he repeatedly sought Caliph Umar's permission to continue his craft. Eventually, after much persistence, he was allowed to tell his stories before the weekly Friday prayer. However, it is said that one day, when he prolonged his storytelling, he was reprimanded with a whip. The specifics of this event are detailed by Mulla Ali Qari in his book "Mawdu'at," published in Lahore on page 16, with references from Imam Tabarani and Ibn Asakir.

¹⁷ Refers to the Quranic verse: {وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يَكُلِّمَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ يَرْسُلَ رَسُولًا...} which translates to: "It is not fitting for a human that Allah should speak to him except through revelation, from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, with His permission, what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High, Most Wise." (Ash-Shura 42:51)

¹⁸ Quoted in Aslam Jairajpuri, Ilm Hadith', published in Amritsar, page 10.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The complete text of this hadith is as follows:

"Al-Daylami, Abu Na'im, and Abu al-Sheikh have reported a hadith from the Prophet, which states:

القرآن صعب مستصعب على من كرهه وهو الحكم فمن استمسك بحديثي وفهمه وحفظه جاء مع القرآن.
وفيه ان الحديث لا يفارق القرآن وإنهما كثي واحد ومن تهاون بالقرآن وحديثي خسر الدنيا والآخرة امرت امتي
بأن يأخذوا بقولي و يطيعوا أمري ويتبعوا سنتي فمن رضي بقولي فقد رضي بالقرآن' قال تعالى {وما آتاكـم
الرسـول فخذـوه...} الآية 'من اقتـدى بي فهو مـنـي وـمن رـغـبـ عنـ سـنـتـيـ فـلـيـسـ مـنـيـ'."

Translation:

"The Quran is challenging and complex for those who dislike it, and it is the ultimate authority. Whoever holds onto my hadith, understands it, and memorizes it, will come with the Quran. The hadith does not separate from the Quran; they are like one thing. Whoever neglects the Quran and my hadith will lose both this world and the hereafter. I have commanded my Ummah to adhere to my words, obey my orders, and follow my Sunnah. Whoever is pleased with my word, indeed, accepts the Quran.

Allah Almighty says, 'Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it...' (Verse). Whoever follows me is of me, and whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me."

²¹ Mukhtasar Jami' Bayan al-Ilm, Quoted in Jairajpuri, 'Ilm al-Hadith, op. cit., page 10.

²² The hadith that hints at another Quran alongside the one we have, promising "مثلك معه" (something like it with it), is a bombshell in theoretical discourse. Yet, it's bewildering that such a pivotal hadith flew under the radar of the heavyweight hadith scholars. The titans of hadith literature—Muwatta Imam Malik, Bukhari, and Muslim—are glaringly silent on these accounts. If the grandmasters of hadith were oblivious to a hadith poised to anchor the community's doctrine, it inevitably stirs up serious skepticism about its legitimacy.

This hadith, suggesting the existence of another Quran, has been attributed to various esteemed companions by different narrators, casting doubt on its authenticity. Experts in narrator reliability have expressed significant skepticism regarding these claims. Notably, Abu Bakr Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi highlights Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karib Al-Kindi Al-Shami in his book 'Kifayah' as one of the main narrators. Additionally, this hadith, albeit with slight variations, appears in the collections of Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Darqutni, and Musnad Ahmad.

Other narrators of this hadith include Abu Rafi', the Prophet's freed slave; Arbad bin Sariyah, a companion from Suffah; Jabir bin Abdullah Al-Khazraji Al-Salami Al-Ansari; and Abdullah bin Abbas. It is surprising that prominent hadith scholars such as Imam Bukhari, Imam Muslim, and Imam Malik, as well as the four rightly guided Caliphs and other senior companions, were completely unaware of this hadith. This raises questions about why such a significant hadith was transmitted only by lesser-known companions, many of whom lived in Syria or Kufa. Moreover, the obscurity of this hadith in Medina, the Prophet's city, adds another layer of mystery. Let's delve deeper into the content of this controversial hadith, primarily attributed to Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karib.

(قال أبو بكر الخطيب في الكفاية) أخبرنا أبو محمد الحسن بن علي بن أحمد بن بشار النيسابوري بالبصرة قال: حدثنا أبو بكر محمد بن أحمد بن محموية العسكري قال: حدثنا سليمان بن عبد الحميد البحرياني قال: حدثنا علي بن عياش وأبو اليمان قالا: حدثنا حرب بن عثمان قال: حدثي عبد الرحمن بن أبي عوف الجرشي عن المقدام بن معدى كرب عن رسول الله ﷺ أن قال: ألا إني أوتيت الكتاب ومثله معه، ألا إني قد أوتيت القرآن ومثله. لا يوشك رجل شيعان على أربكة يقول عليكم بهذا القرآن فما وجدتم فيه من حلال فاحلوه، وما وجدتم فيه من حرام فحرموه. إلا لا يحل لكم الحمار الأهلي ولا كل ذي ناب من السباع ولا لقطة من مال معاهد إلا أن يستغنى عنها صاحبها.

(Abu Bakr Al-Khatib stated in Al-Kifayah) Abu Muhammad Al-Hassan bin Ali bin Ahmad bin Bashar from Nishapur reported in Basra: Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Mahmuyah Al-Askari told us; Sulaiman bin Abdul Hamid Al-Bahrani told us; Ali bin Ayyash and Abu Al-Yaman both said; Hariz bin Usman told us; Abdur Rahman bin Abi Auf Al-Jarshi told us from Al-Miqdam bin Ma'di Karib, from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, who said: "Behold, I was given the Book and its like with it. Indeed, I have been given the Quran and its like. Soon a man leaning on his couch might say, 'Stick to this Quran; whatever you find in it of the permissible, deem it permissible, and whatever you find in it of the forbidden, deem it forbidden.' Except that domestic donkeys, all predatory animals with fangs, and found property from a non-Muslim land are not permissible unless their owner does not need them."

This hadith, which seeks to identify an additional source of divine revelation beyond the Quran, appears to address the Quranic challenge expressed in {...فَلِيأْتُوا بِحَدِيثٍ مُّثِلِّهِ} (52:34). For those who recognize the Quran as the definitive, unique, and unparalleled expression of divine revelation, and who adhere to its guidance as fully comprehensive, as stated in {...تَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ} (The Bee: 89) and {...وَمَا فَرَطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ} (The Cattle: 38), there is sufficient Quranic foundation to dismiss this hadith as trivial, unfounded, and fabricated. Additionally, for the peace of mind of hadith scholars, further information about the narrators may also contribute to reassurance. Let's first examine the narrations attributed to Al-Miqdam ibn Ma'di Karib. This hadith is reported by Hasan bin Jabir and Abdur Rahman bin Abi Auf Al-Homsi Al-Shami. Hasan bin Jabir is largely unknown among scholars of

narrator reliability, and no other narrations are attributed to him besides this one. Similarly, Abdur Rahman bin Abi Auf Al-Homsi is considered an unknown figure by Yahya bin Sa'id Al-Qattan. Additionally, the narrator Hariz bin Usman is also mentioned in these reports. He is well-known among hadith scholars for his staunch Kharijite beliefs. It is reported that he frequently spoke harshly against Caliph Ali, and when he encountered the famous Shia hadith, "أَنْتَ مَنِي بِمَنْزِلَةِ هَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَىٰ" (You are to me as Aaron was to Moses), he controversially declared, "أَنْتَ مَنِي بِمَنْزِلَةِ قَارُونَ مِنْ مُوسَىٰ" (It should rather be, 'You are to me as Korah was to Moses.')."

Now let's look at another chain of narration found in Sunan Abu Dawood, where the hadith is transmitted by Hariz bin Usman, relayed through Abu Amro bin Kathir bin Dinar, from whom Abdul Wahab bin Najdah narrates, leading to Abu Dawood himself. Abu Amro bin Kathir remains an elusive figure; even the commentators on Abu Dawood are unable to confirm his existence or offer any details about him. Moreover, there is another chain involving Hariz bin Usman Al-Homsi, transmitted through Abul Yaman Hakam bin Nafi and Ali bin Ayyash. From them, the narration is relayed by Sulaiman bin Abdul Hamid Al-Bahrani Al-Homsi, who is described by Imam Nasa'i as "كَذَابٌ لَّيْسَ بِثَقَةٍ وَّلَا مَأْمُونٌ" (a liar, neither trustworthy nor reliable), as mentioned in "مَهْدِيَّ الْمُهَدِّيَّب".

The narrations attributed to Abu Rafi' demonstrate a similar pattern of doubt. Reports indicate that Abu Rafi's son, Ubaidullah bin Abi Rafi, and subsequently Salim Abu Nadhr, narrated these hadiths. Hadith scholars note that Ubaidullah bin Abi Rafi passed away in 73 AH during the conflict involving Abdullah bin Zubair, at a time when Salim Abu Nadhr was merely four years old. Given that all chains of narration from Abu Rafi' pass through Salim Abu Nadhr, the authenticity of these narratives is thus cast into doubt. The narrations linked to Arbad bin Sariyah, Jabir bin Abdullah, and Ibn Abbas also face similar scrutiny. Within Arbad's chain is Ash'ath bin Sha'bah Al-Khurasani Al-Humaisi, who is considered a weak narrator according to the author of Mishkat. Furthermore, Muhammad bin Hussein Abu Al-Fath bin Baridah Al-Azdi Al-Mawsili, who died in 374

AH, also identified him as weak in his narrations, as recorded by Al-Dhahabi in *Tadzhkirat al-Huffaz*. Regarding the chain from Jabir bin Abdullah, it features Muhammad bin Abdalmunkadir, from whom Ubad bin Kathir and Yazid Al-Raqashi have narrated. Regarding Al-Raqashi's credibility, "Tahdhib al-Tahdhib" records that Imam Shu'bah stated he would rather commit adultery than narrate hadiths from Al-Raqashi, underscoring his profound mistrust. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal categorized him as someone who denies authentic hadiths. Additionally, both Nasa'i and Hakim have described him as unreliable and dismissed in the field of hadith narration. Concerning Ubad bin Kathir al-Basri, there is a consensus among scholars that he was a fabricator and a liar. His student, Ubad bin Suhayb, who is also in this chain of narrators, is noted for being even more prolific in fabricating hadiths than his teacher. While the narration attributed to Ibn Abbas does not explicitly contain the phrase "مثلاً معه" (like it with it), the overall tone and context imply related themes. However, the credibility of this narration is also questionable, as the chain of narrators leading to Abu Bakr Al-Khatib's teacher is populated with several unknown figures. One such name is Hamzah bin Abi Hamzah al-Nasibi, whom Ibn Hajar in "Tahdhib al-Tahdhib" mentions as generally having his hadiths considered rejected. Some scholars have also accused him of fabricating hadiths.

This concerns the narrators of the hadith "مثلاً معه" (like it with it), which has been used to justify seeking guidance outside the Quran. This hadith has led to human-compiled collections of hadiths being regarded as equivalent to the Quran, causing many sincere Muslims to tirelessly search through historical and traditional narratives in pursuit of the Sunnah. Despite extensive debates spanning over eleven to twelve centuries, the hadith "مثلاً معه" has not been successful in encompassing the scope of non-recited revelation, nor has any collection of hadith been unanimously accepted as an authoritative, complete, and definitive compilation of non-recited revelation. For further details on the individuals involved in this

hadith, refer to "Tamanna Imadi: Ijaz al-Quran wa Ikhtilaf al-Qira'at," pages 231-266.

²³ Hazmi, Nasikh wa Mansukh, Quoted in Zaroorat Hadith aur Munkireen Hadith, Sahifah Ahl Hadith, Karachi Hadith: 1952, Page 23

²⁴ Op. cit., p.66

²⁵ Ibn Kathir, op. cit., Page 68

²⁶ عن حسان قال كان جبرائيل ينزل على النبي بالسنة كما ينزل عليه بالقرآن (مسند دارمي)

(Hassan said: Gabriel would descend upon the Prophet with the Sunnah just as he would descend with the Quran. - Musnad Darimi)

²⁷ Al-Risalah li-Shafi'i, p. 28 quoted in *Da'irat al-Ma'arif* Urdu, under the heading "Sunnah" p. 406

²⁸ Imam Bayhaqi has narrated from Shafi'i regarding the interpretation of the terms "al-kitab wa al-hikmah" (the book and wisdom). Shafi'i stated: "سمعت من أرضي من أهل العلم بالقرآن يقول الحكمة سنة رسول الله ﷺ" (I heard from those whom I consider knowledgeable about the Quran saying that 'hikmah' (wisdom) is the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ). He then cited his chains from Hasan, Qatadah, and Yahya bin Abi Kathir, who stated that 'hikmah' in this verse refers to the Sunnah. Additionally, he provided his chain from Al-Miqdam bin Ma'di Karib, who narrated from the Prophet ﷺ that "لَا اُنَا اُوتِيتُ الْكِتَابَ وَمِثْلُهُ مَعَهُ" ("Behold, I was given the book and along with it something like it.").

²⁹ This part of the hadith, "لَا يَحِلُّ لِكُمُ الْجَمَارُ الْأَهْلِيُّ" (It is not permissible for you [to eat] the domestic donkey), has sparked debate among jurists, with some supporting the permissibility of consuming domestic donkey meat. In Sahih Bukhari, there's a report from Ibn Abbas where he refutes the prohibition of eating domestic donkey meat. He bases his argument on the Quranic verse: {قُلْ لَا أَجِدُ فِيمَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مُحْرِماً عَلَى طَاعِمٍ يَطْعَمُه} (Al-An'am:145), which translates to "Say, I do not find in what has been revealed to me anything forbidden to an eater who wishes to eat it." According to this verse, Ibn Abbas contends that only the items explicitly declared forbidden in the

Quran are prohibited, and there is no basis for declaring anything else as forbidden.

Refer to the chapter on the meat of domestic donkeys in "Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari," published in Cairo, 1988, Volume 9, Page 570, Hadith Number 5529.

³⁰ Refer to the book "Al-Umm" under the discussion of the verse { وَنَزَّلْ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابُ وَالْحِكْمَةُ }

³¹ The concept of 'hikmah' as an independent Sunnah, found in the deep archives of sayings and traditions, didn't exactly catch on universally during Shafi'i's time, despite his sharp, convincing arguments. There was a real standoff between Shafi'i and the theologians—think of it as a battle of wits. Yet, over time, Shafi'i's interpretation of the Sunnah began to catch on with the general public. Part of this growing acceptance was due to Shafi'i's prominent role as a trailblazer in the field of hadith, where he laid down the principles and foundations—essentially making him a rock star of religious jurisprudence.

Meanwhile, the theologians got bogged down in knotty debates about the creation of the Quran, which started to undermine their credibility. As they delved into these complex discussions, the straightforward and relatable approach of the hadith scholars about the Sunnah started to win over people. Also, narratives that presented the Sunnah as divinely delivered, similar to the Quran, gained traction, solidifying the status of 'hikmah' as more than just an additional scriptural footnote. This shift wasn't just subtle; it marked a major change in how divine guidance was perceived and embraced.

After Shafi'i, the thinkers who sliced 'hikmah' away from the Quran and branded 'Sunnah' as something outside the Quranic text were deeply influenced by a certain hadith. Shafi'i himself, shaped by his era, not only embraced this narrative but became its zealous advocate. He and his followers articulated the Quran and Sunnah as two distinct entities, dubbed the 'Book' and 'Wisdom,' and went on to categorize them into recited revelation ('wahi matlu') and non-recited revelation ('wahi ghair matlu').

Enter Ibn Hazm, known for his keen insight and non-conformist approach. Yet, even he fell prey to traditional interpretations of 'hikmah' and 'Sunnah'. Rather than innovating or building upon the understanding of his predecessors, he accepted the established interpretation. Ibn Hazm argued that just as we follow the recited revelations of the Quran, we should also adhere to the non-recited teachings, encapsulated in the directive 'Obey Allah and obey the Messenger.' This belief covers both forms of divine guidance. For more on this, check out Ibn Hazm's "Al-Ahkam fi Usul Al-Ahkam," edited by Ahmad Shakir, Cairo, 1322H, Volume 1, Page 96.

The pursuit of wisdom outside the Quran slowly became an accepted academic and religious practice. Over time, few questioned this approach. The notion of dual sources of revelation became so accepted that, by Ghazali's time, it was deeply embedded in our core beliefs. Ghazali himself explained, "Sometimes God sends His revelation as the Quran, and other times as a revelation that cannot be recited—this is known as the Sunnah." From Shafi'i to Ghazali, the idea of non-recited revelation ('wahi ghair matlu') tied to 'hikmah' was widely accepted, yet a crucial detail was often overlooked: the Quran itself pairs 'hikmah' with Allah's verses as something the Quran actively seeks out. The verse واذكرون ما ينزل في بيوتكن من آيات "الله والحكمة" ("And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom.") (Al-Ahzab:34) highlights this point, yet this significant connection was frequently ignored in the discourse.

³² The way wisdom's descent is detailed in the hadith books not only clashes with the Quranic vibe of revelation—{يؤتي الحكمة من يشاء—} ("He grants wisdom to whom He wills...")—it turns the divine download into something that sounds more like a cosmic Google search, fueled by human nosiness.

Here's the scene: Jubair bin Mut'im reports a guy popping a question to the Prophet, asking, "Which spots does Allah dig the most and which ones does He loathe?" The Prophet's like, "Hold up, I need to hit up Gabriel on this." So Gabriel swings by—another version has him zipping up to the

heavens first—then gets back and drops the knowledge: Allah's top picks are the mosques, and His least favorites? The markets. Here is the Arabic text:

عن جبير بن مطعم أن رجلاً قال: يا رسول الله، أي البلدان أحب إلى الله وأبغض إليه؟ قال: لا أدرى حتى أسأله جبريل. فأتاها جبريل، وعند الطبراني في الأوسط، ففرج إلى السماء ثم أتتها فأخبره أن أحب البقاء إلى الله المساجد وأبغض البقاء إلى الله الأسواق. (مسند أحمد والطبراني)

³³ Darimi has narrated this hadith from the chain of Jabir: "Soon, a man reclining on his couch will hear one of my hadiths and say, 'Between us and you is the Book of Allah. Whatever we find in it as permissible, we will consider permissible, and whatever we find in it as forbidden, we will consider forbidden.' Indeed, what the Messenger of Allah has forbidden is like what Allah has forbidden!"

"ليوشك الرجل متكتناً على أريكته يحدث بحديثي فيقول بيننا وبينكم كتاب الله ما وجدنا فيه من حلال استحللناه وما وجدنا فيه من حرام حرمناه وإن ما حرم رسول الله فهو مثل ما حرم الله!"

³⁴ The authentic collections are rife with narrations that clash head-on with established historical facts. Take Sahih Bukhari, for instance, which claims that no companion from the Battle of Badr survived the chaos following Uthman's caliphate. Or consider those other hadiths that insist Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was illiterate. These aren't just minor discrepancies—they're jarring contradictions that make you question the narrative.

³⁵ Quoted in Sahifah Ahl Hadith, op.cit., page 87

³⁶ Wali al-Din al-Tabrizi writes in the introduction to Mishkat: "When I attribute a hadith to them (the collectors), it is as if I am attributing it to the Prophet (ﷺ) because they have meticulously documented it from him."

"إذا نسبت الحديث إليهم كأنني أنسنت إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم لأنهم قد فرغوا متقدوا عنونا عنه."

³⁷ This type of hadith has been narrated in different words. In Mustadrak Hakim, Urwah's narration goes:

"أمرین اثنین: كتاب الله وسنته نبیکم. أهبا الناس اسمعوا ما أقول لكم تعيشوا به."

(Two matters: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of your Prophet. O people, listen to what I say to you, and you will live by it.)

Similarly, Imam Malik has narrated:

الزموا ما قال رسول الله ﷺ في حجة الوداع: أمران تركهما فيكم لن تضلوا ما تمسكتم بهما: كتاب الله وسنة نبيه.

(Adhere to what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said in his Farewell Pilgrimage: 'I leave behind two matters with you; you will never go astray as long as you hold onto them: the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet.')
(Hakim and Bayhaqi)

³⁸ عليكم بسنني وسنة الخلفاء الراشدين المهديين

³⁹ Many narratives extolling Ali's extraordinary virtues originated during the turbulent period following the assassination of Caliph Uthman, a time marked by severe internal conflicts among Muslims. These hadiths often reflect a form of tribalism that directly contradicts the Islamic teaching that the most noble in God's sight are those who are most pious, as stated in { إن حب علي مسنن لا يضر معها سئنه وبغضه سئنه لا ينفع معها }. The saying أكرمكم عند الله أتقاكم سينه suggests that love for Ali can atone for all wrongs, and hatred towards him is an unforgivable sin, a concept somewhat analogous to certain Jewish beliefs that mere respectful mention of their ancestors and rabbis assures entry into paradise. This idea was later morphed into a form of racial supremacy by the propagandists of the Abbasid Caliphate. In "Jami' al-Bayan," Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal references the verse { إلا المودة في القربى } to convey a saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Al-Abbas: "لا يدخل قلب امرء إيمان حتى يحبكم" — "No one truly possesses faith until he loves you." This suggests that genuine affection for the Prophet's family is essential for true faith. Statements attributed to the Prophet about Ali, such as "هذا وصي وأخي خليفة من بعدي فاسمعوا له وأطيعوا به" — "He is my successor, my brother, and my caliph after me; listen to him and obey him," and about Al-Abbas, "العباس وصي ووارثي" — "Al-Abbas is my successor and heir," indicate the political use of sacred history. These narratives were crafted to bolster political legitimacy, as seen in prophetic predictions that specify future rulers by name and year. For example, a prophecy claims that in the year 135 AH, governance will belong to Al-Abbas and his descendants, including figures like Al-Saffah, Al-Mahdi, and Al-Mansur. Many hadiths

in the collections of Tirmidhi, Abu Dawood, and Ibn Majah appear to have been fabricated to support the political legitimacy of the Abbasid caliphs. Supporters of Muawiya also made full use of hadiths to their advantage. One such hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declares: "الْأَمَانَةُ تَلَاثَةٌ: أَنَا وَجَرِيلٌ وَمَعَاوِيَةٌ" ("The trustworthy are three: I, Gabriel, and Muawiya"), suggesting Muawiya's trustworthiness. Another narration has the Prophet addressing Muawiya, saying, "أَنْتَ مِنِّي وَأَنَا مِنْكَ" ("You are from me, and I am from you"), indicating a special bond. These narrations seem to counter those favored by Ali's supporters during a time of intense political and social upheaval.

In an era characterized by political confusion and civil strife, where narratives were often employed to legitimize political power, it was not unusual for beliefs to emerge that portrayed the ruling regime as divinely sanctioned. The Umayyad period, in particular, saw the state's endorsement of Qadari beliefs (which emphasize human free will), leading to the emergence of reactionary sects like the Jabriyah, who advocated predestination, and the Murji'ah, who reserved judgement on sinners. Moreover, narratives that supported maintaining the status quo promoted the idea that "السُّلْطَانُ ظَلُّ اللَّهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ، مَنْ أَكْرَمَهُ أَكْرَمَهُ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ أَهَانَهُ أَهَانَهُ اللَّهُ" ("the Sultan is God's shadow on Earth; whoever honors him is honored by God, and whoever dishonors him is dishonored by God"). It's important to note that the term "Sultan" was not commonly used to refer to rulers or kings during the Prophet's era or even in the early Umayyad period; its usage likely started with the Seljuks.

Consider another intriguing example of the political use of hadiths:

لَا أَقْتَدُ فِي الْجَنَّةِ إِلَّا مَعَاوِيَةً فَبِيَّنَ أَنَّفَا بَعْدَ وَقْتٍ طَوِيلٍ فَأَقُولُ مِنْ أَينَ مَعَاوِيَةً، فَيَقُولُ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّي؟ بِنَاجِيِنِي '— 'أَنَّاجِيهُ، فَيَقُولُ هَذَا مَمَائِلٌ مِنْ عَرْضِكَ فِي الدُّنْيَا

— 'I will be seated in Paradise, and after a long while, I will see Muawiya approaching. I will ask, "Where have you come from, Muawiya?" He will reply, "From the presence of my Lord, who was confiding in me as I in Him." The Prophet will say, "This high station is yours because you were disparaged in the world." (Mustafa Husayni Saba'i, Sunnat Rasool, translated by Malik Ghulam Ali, Lahore 1373H).

⁴⁰ According to Shia scholars, the Hadith of Thaqalayn is as follows:

"تركت فيكم الثقلين كتاب الله وعترتي أهل بيتي ما إن تمسكتم بهما لن تضلوا من بعدي أبداً"

Translation: "I am leaving among you two precious things: the Book of Allah and my family, the members of my household. As long as you hold onto them, you will never go astray after me."

⁴¹ Refer to Abu Dawood, Book of Night Prayer.

⁴² See "Usul al-Fiqh" by Khudari, page 257; "Husul al-Ma'mul," page 22; "Tawjih al-Nazar" by al-Jazairi, page 3; "Ta'rifat" by al-Jurjani, page 82; "Nuzhat al-Nazar" by al-Khatir al-Atir, Volume 1, page 236; "Ahkam" by Ibn Hazm, Volume 2, page 6; "Risalat Usul" by Zain al-Din al-Halabi, page 16, 808 AH.

⁴³ Refer to "Nur al-Anwar," page 173.

⁴⁴ Hasan Ahmad Khatib, "Fiqh al-Islam," Karachi, 1961, page 69.

⁴⁵ Those who argue that Prophet Muhammad had a personal identity distinct from his prophetic role often point to the story of Barirah. She decided to separate from her husband, Mughith, despite the Prophet's advice. Barirah asked, "O Messenger of Allah, is this a command from you as the Messenger or just your personal opinion?" When he clarified it was his personal opinion, she stood her ground. The Prophet, with his characteristic grace, accepted her decision.

There's another tale about his advice on tree planting, which didn't quite hit the mark, highlighting that not all his suggestions were divine mandates.

⁴⁶ See: "Al-Qawl Al-Ma'mul fi Fan Al-Usul," page 78; "Qawa'id Al-Usul" by Safi Al-Din Al-Hanbali, page 91, 684 AH. Also, "Muslim Al-Thubut," Volume 2, page 66.

⁴⁷ The Shafi'i's bolster their position with these narrations:

بسربه بنت صفوان بنت مروى بنت سيرج: إنما سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يأمر بالوضوء من مس الفرج.

(Translation: Busrā bint Safwān narrated: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) command that ablution is necessary after touching the private parts.")

حدثنا يونس قال أبا ابن وهب قال حدثني سعيد بن عبد الرحمن عن هشام بن عروة عن أبيه عن سيرى عن النبي ﷺ قال: إذا مس أحدكم ذكره فلا يصلين حتى يتوضأ.

(Translation: Yunus narrated to us, saying: Ibn Wahb narrated to me, saying: Sa'id bin Abdul Rahman narrated to me from Hisham bin Urwah from his father from Busrā from the Prophet ﷺ, who said: "If one of you touches his private part, he should not pray until he performs ablution.")

For detailed discussions on the issue, see: Imam Abu Ja'far Tahawi (died 321 AH), "Sharh Ma'anī al-Athar," Volume 1, page 58.

⁴⁸ The Hanafis support their position with this hadith:

"حدثنا محمد بن خزيمة قال ثنا حجاج قال ثنا ملازم عن عبد الله بن بدر عن قيس بن طلق عن أبيه عن النبي ﷺ أنه سأله رجل فقال: يا نبي الله، ما ترى في مس الرجل ذكره بعد ما توضأ؟ فقال النبي ﷺ: هل هو إلا بضعة منك أو مضحة منك".

Translation: "Muhammad bin Khuzaymah narrated to us, saying: Hajjaj narrated to us, saying: Mulazim narrated to us from Abdullah bin Badr from Qais bin Talq from his father, who said that a man asked the Prophet ﷺ, 'O Prophet of Allah, what do you say about a man touching his private part after performing ablution?' The Prophet ﷺ replied, 'Is it not just a part of your body or a piece of flesh?'"

⁴⁹ Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence often sling accusations of sectarian bias at each other, especially when it comes to critiquing hadiths and sizing up narrators. The squabble over whether touching the private part (مس ذكر) nullifies ablution is a classic showcase of this rivalry. For instance, Bayhaqi casually dismisses Imam Tahawi's grasp on hadith sciences, lighting up the longstanding tiff between the Hanafis and Shafi'i school. The Hanafis argue that Bayhaqi, despite his scholarly prowess, is pretty myopic when it comes to anything Hanafi. They claim his entire hadith compilation seems skewed toward pumping up the Shafi'i school. The Hanafis also throw shade at Bayhaqi in "Sunan al-Kubra," accusing him of deliberately downplaying hadiths that back the Hanafi viewpoint while giving a thumbs up to those that prop the Shafi'i school.

For a detailed discussion, check out Sheikh Alauddin Ali bin Uthman, famously known as Ibn al-Turkamani, and his book "Al-Jawahir al-Hanafi fi al-Radd 'ala al-Bayhaqi," where he lays bare Bayhaqi's sectarian leanings.

⁵⁰ Imam Tahawi has narrated with his chain from Abu Hurairah:

"إِنِّي سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ يَقُولُ: تَوَضُّوْ مَا مَسَّ النَّارَ"

Translation: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say, 'Perform ablution from what the fire has touched.'" This is found in Imam Ja'far Tahawi's "Sharh Ma'anī al-Āثار," page 50.

⁵¹ This hadith contradicts the first one:

Narrated by Abu Hurairah:

"عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَكَلَ مِنْ ثُورٍ قَطْعَةً فَتَوَضَّأَ، ثُمَّ أَكَلَ بَعْدَ كَثِيرًا فَصَلَّى وَلَمْ يَتَوَضَّأْ."

Translation: "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) ate from a piece of cooked meat, then performed ablution, after which he ate a shoulder (of meat) and prayed without performing ablution again."

⁵² Imam Tahawi has narrated this hadith with his chain from Abu Hurairah. See: Imam Ja'far Tahawi, "Sharh Ma'anī al-Āثار," Volume 1, page 26.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Imam Tahawi's attempt to reconcile two conflicting hadiths regarding ablution ended up adding complexity to the discussion. For instance, one hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah goes as follows:

"لَا صَلَاةٌ لِمَنْ لَا وَضُوءٌ لَهُ وَلَا وَضُوءٌ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَذْكُرْ اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ"

Translation: "There is no prayer for the one who does not perform ablution, and there is no ablution for the one who does not say the name of Allah upon it."

This hadith implies that just as prayers are invalid without ablution, ablution itself is invalid without invoking 'Bismillah' (In the name of Allah).

However, a contradictory narration involving the Muhajirun of Qunfudh states:

"رَسُولُ اللَّهِ كَانَ يَتَوَضَّأُ وَتَأْخُرُ عَنِ الرَّدِّ عَلَى التَّحْيَةِ لِأَنَّهُ قَالَ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ أَنْ يَذْكُرَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا عَلَى طَهَارَةٍ"

Translation: "The Prophet was performing ablution and delayed responding to a greeting because he said he did not like to remember Allah without being in a state of ablution."

To reconcile these differing accounts, Tahawi introduces two additional teachings. He explains:

"مثـل الشـخص الـذـي يـعـطـي تـمـرـة أـو قـطـعـة طـعـام، فـلا تـجـعـلـوا الـوضـوء بـلا بـسـمـلـة غـير صـحـيحـ، لـكـنـه لـيـس كـامـلـاً"

Translation: "Just as a person isn't considered destitute if they can give away a date or a piece of food, ablution without 'Bismillah' is still valid but not complete."

This analogy suggests that while ablution without saying 'Bismillah' may still be valid, it isn't considered ideal or complete, similar to how the definitions of poverty or faith are not absolute.

At first glance, this approach to reconciling the two hadiths might seem effective, but a closer examination reveals that it actually complicates the matter further. The hadith clearly states that just as prayers are invalid without ablution, ablution itself is invalid without saying 'Bismillah' (In the name of Allah). If we accept the notion that ablution without 'Bismillah' is merely incomplete rather than invalid, we might then be tempted to consider that prayers without full ablution could be weak, incomplete, but still valid. However, there's a universal agreement within the community that prayer without ablution is outright invalid, unlike the non-universal requirement of saying 'Bismillah' during ablution. While trying to resolve discrepancies between narrations with irrelevant examples and unnecessary reconciliations might seem to eliminate conflicts, it fails to address the deeper, fundamental inconsistencies between historical practices and established Sunnah.

⁵⁵ Refer to Tamanna Imadi, "I'jaz al-Qur'an wa Ikhtilaf al-Qira'at," Karachi, 1414 AH, page 313.

⁵⁶ Also see "Seerat Bukhari," Volume 2, page 208.

⁵⁷ By its nature, history, no matter the era or how well it's preserved, cannot claim to be fully comprehensive. This is particularly true for the 23 years of the Prophet Muhammad's mission, which is too vast for any historical account to fully capture. As a result, the body of jurisprudence developed from the recorded sayings and actions of that time is inherently uncertain. There's always been a concern that if additional hadiths, reports, or accounts of the companions were available, our understanding of certain

issues might be quite different, and scholars might have approached these issues from another angle.

The scholars of hadith, known as Muhaddithun, often lament that they did not have access to all possible narratives and evidence. They suggest that with more complete information, they might have reconsidered some of their positions. This issue of incomplete information also affects the jurists among the hadith scholars, highlighting the intrinsic limitations in their interpretations due to gaps in the historical record. Imam Bukhari, often regarded as a foundational figure in the jurisprudence of hadith and a strong advocate of Imam Shafi'i's positions, employed a method for deriving legal rulings that involved synthesizing various hadiths. Despite his significant scholarly stature, this method cannot be seen as the definitive approach to hadith jurisprudence. In his work, Imam Bukhari notably used the collective implications of all relevant narrations to deduce legal issues, which might suggest that he effectively distilled the essence of these hadiths.

However, it's important to note that his conclusions were influenced by the specific hadiths available to him. The addition or absence of even a single narration could have led him to a different legal interpretation. This points to the adaptive and contingent nature of his methodology, indicating that his conclusions might have varied with different sets of hadiths.

To explore how the organization of hadiths can influence legal interpretations, let's look at how Bukhari discusses the topic of women attending mosques. He presents three hadiths in a particular sequence in a chapter titled: "Is the Friday bath obligatory for those who do not attend the Friday prayers, such as women and children?" Here, Ibn Umar clarifies that the Friday bath is obligatory only for those required to attend the prayer.

At the end of the chapter, there is a hadith from Umar, which reports the Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) directive:

"لَا تُمْنِعُو إِمَاءَ اللَّهِ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ"

Translation: "Do not prevent Allah's servant-women from attending Allah's mosques."

Earlier in the same chapter, another hadith from Umar states:

"أذنوا للنساء بالليل إلى المساجد"

Translation: "Allow women to go to the mosque at night."

These narrations lead to several conclusions:

Women cannot be prevented from going to the mosque at night, although there might be reasons to restrict their attendance during the day. Since the Friday prayer is conducted during the day, it does not pertain to women. As a result, the Friday bath, which is linked to attending Friday prayers, is not obligatory for women.

These insights are derived from synthesizing the three hadiths. If any one of these hadiths, such as "Do not prevent Allah's servant-women from attending Allah's mosques" or "Allow women to the mosques at night," had not been available to Bukhari, the rulings on women's participation in Friday prayers or the Friday bath obligation might have been markedly different.

Since one hadith can influence another and historical information can reshape our understanding of another piece, it's challenging to claim that we have access to all statements or a complete account of the Prophet's life. Thus, any jurisprudence developed solely from these narrations will always seem incomplete. Moreover, hadith scholars, who never claim complete access to all narrations and often reject dubious ones due to strict standards, acknowledge a perpetual sense of inconclusiveness in hadith-based jurisprudence. The possibility remains that an undiscovered hadith could emerge and offer a new perspective.

This uncertainty parallels discussions about historical figures like Imam Abu Hanifa, who, if he had access to the six major hadith collections, might have revised many of his positions. Similarly, if hadith scholars had access to earlier compilations from the Tabi'un or all rare books composed by later scholars were available, these could significantly impact our understanding of Islamic law. Regardless of whether jurisprudence is based

on practices or scholarly opinions, an inherent sense of it being incomplete will always persist.

⁵⁸ Refer to "Seerat Bukhari," Volume 2, page 173

⁵⁹ In "Tafsir Fath al-Bayan," Volume 5, page 234, under the interpretation of the verse **لتبين للناس مانزل لهم**:

"ويبيان الكتاب يطلب من السنة والمبين لنذلك المجمل هو الرسول ﷺ ولهذا قيل متى وقع تعارض بين القرآن والحديث وجب تقديم الحديث لأن القرآن مجمل والحديث مبين بدلالة هذه الآية والمبين مقدم على المجمل."

Translation: "The explanation of the Book (Quran) is sought through the Sunnah, and the Messenger (ﷺ) is the one who clarifies what is ambiguous. Therefore, it is stated that when there is an apparent conflict between the Quran and a hadith, the hadith must be given precedence because the Quran is general and the hadith provides clarification, as indicated by this verse. This means that whenever there appears to be a contradiction between the Quran and a hadith, it is necessary to prioritize the hadith."

⁶⁰ The hadith "لـوـصـيـة لـوارـث" (no bequest for an heir) is featured in four major hadith collections—Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah—through three distinct chains of narration involving key transmitters such as Anas bin Malik, Abu Umamah al-Bahili, and Amr bin Kharijah. Comparative analysis of these narrations raises doubts about their authenticity. Notably, the widespread recognition of this hadith might stem from how Bukhari titled a chapter with these words in his collection, though he did not find any reliable hadiths to include in it, leaving the chapter empty. However, he did cite a saying of Ibn Abbas in this section, which does not directly support the "no bequest for an heir" rule. It appears that by Bukhari's time, this principle had already gained significant acceptance, possibly even becoming a commonly accepted notion, which might explain why Bukhari established a chapter under this title and was keen to find supporting hadiths. The absence of these hadiths in Sahih Bukhari, unlike in other collections, suggests that Bukhari may not have been fully satisfied with the available narrations or their chains of transmission.

In Sahih Bukhari, Ibn Abbas's statement doesn't directly address the principle of "no bequest for an heir" nor does it discuss any abrogation of verses related to this topic. His statement is as follows, presented in its original context from Bukhari:

Chapter: No Bequest for an Heir

"حدثنا محمد بن يوسف عن ورقاء عن ابن نجيح عن عطاء عن ابن عباس قال: كان المال للولد وكانت الوصية للوالدين فنسخ الله من ذلك ما أحب فجعل للذكر مثل حظ الأنثيين فجعل للأبوبين لكل واحد منها السادس وجعل المرأة الثمن والربع وللزوج الشرط والربع".

Translation: "Muhammad bin Yusuf reported from Warqa, from Ibn Najih, from Ata, from Ibn Abbas, who said: Initially, the wealth was for the child, and the bequest was for the parents. Allah then abrogated what He wished, establishing that a male should inherit the share of two females. He allotted one-sixth of the inheritance to each parent, one-eighth and one-quarter to the wife, and half and one-quarter to the husband."

This narration explains that originally, wealth was meant for the children, and bequests were intended for the parents. Allah then revised these rules, setting specific shares where a son receives twice the share of a daughter, parents each receive one-sixth, the wife gets one-eighth and one-quarter, and the husband receives half and one-quarter. Consider the Quranic verse that mandates bequests for parents and close relatives. However, Ibn Abbas's narration suggests that initially, the wealth was intended for the son and the bequest for the parents. It's unclear if Ibn Abbas is referring to the Quranic directive on bequests or to practices from the pre-Islamic era. This ambiguity has led some scholars to believe that his statement might be alluding to ancient Arab customs, where daughters traditionally did not receive any inheritance.

In another narration from Ibn Majah, as reported by Amr bin Kharijah, it reads:

"إن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم خطبهم وهو على راحته وإن راحته لتحقق لجرتها وإن لهاها ليسيل بين كفيفه. قال إن الله قسم لكل وارث نصيبه من الميراث فلا يجوز لوارث وصبة. الولد لفراش ولهاها الحجر ومن ادع إلى غير أبيه أو تولى غير مواليه فعليه لعنة الله والملائكة والناس أجمعين لا يقبل منه صرف ولا عدل أو قال عدل ولا صرف".

Translation: "The Prophet ﷺ addressed them while he was on his camel, which was shaking due to its burden, and its saliva was dripping between its shoulders. He said: 'Allah has allotted each heir their share of the inheritance, thus a bequest for an heir is not permissible. The child belongs to the bed [of marriage], and the adulterer gets the stone [gets nothing]. Whoever claims another man as his father or claims allegiance to other than his masters, upon him is the curse of Allah, the angels, and all the people. No compensation or adjustment [of his claim] is accepted from him.'"

In Tirmidhi, the narration is as follows:

"إِنَّ النَّبِيَّ خَطَبَ عَلَى نَاقَتِهِ وَأَنَا تَحْتَ جِرَاهَا وَهِيَ تَقْصُعُ بِجَرَاهَا وَإِنْ لَعَابَهَا لِيُسِيلَ بَيْنَ كَفَيْ فَسْمَعْتَهُ يَقُولُ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَعْطَى كُلَّ ذِيْ حَقٍّ حَقًا فَلَا وَصِيَّةً لِوَارِثٍ، وَالْوَلَدُ لِلْفَرَاشِ وَلِلْعَاهِرِ الْحَجَرِ".

Translation:

"The Prophet delivered a sermon while on his camel; I was beneath its belly, and it was shaking under its load, its saliva dripping between its chest. I heard him say, 'Verily, Allah the Almighty has given everyone their due right, hence no bequest is to be made for an heir, and the child belongs to the marital bed, and for the adulterer is the stone.'"

In Nasa'i, the narration states:

"إِنَّهُ شَهَدَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَخْطُبُ النَّاسَ عَلَى رَاحِلَتِهِ وَإِنَّهَا لِتَقْصُعَ بِجَرَاهَا وَإِنْ لَعَابَهَا لِيُسِيلَ، فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي خُطْبَتِهِ: إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ قَسَمَ لِكُلِّ إِنْسَانٍ قِسْمَتَهُ مِنَ الْمِيرَاثِ فَلَا يَجُوزُ لِوَارِثٍ وَصِيَّةً".

"The Prophet delivered a sermon while on his camel; I was beneath its belly, and it was shaking under its load, its saliva dripping between its chest. I heard him say, 'Verily, Allah the Almighty has given everyone their due right, hence no bequest is to be made for an heir, and the child belongs to the marital bed, and for the adulterer is the stone.'"

In Abu Dawood, the narration goes:

"حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ الْمَرْوَزِيُّ حَدَّثَنِي عَلِيُّ بْنُ حَسِينٍ بْنُ وَاقِدٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ يَزِيدِ النَّوِيِّ عَنْ عَكْرَمَةَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَبَّاسٍ: إِنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا، الْوَصِيَّةُ لِلْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ، فَكَانَتِ الْوَصِيَّةُ كَذَلِكَ حَتَّى نَسَخَهَا آيَةُ الْمِيرَاثِ".

"Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Marwazi narrated to us, from Ali bin Hussein bin Waqid, from his father, from Yazid al-Nuwi, from Ikrimah, from Ibn

Abbas, who said that when someone leaves a will for his parents and close relatives, such was the practice of bequest until it was abrogated by the verse of inheritance."

Additionally, there is a brief narration from Abu Umamah al-Bahili:

"سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول في خطبته عام حجة الوداع: إن الله قد أعطى كل ذي حق حقه فلا وصية لوارث.".

Translation: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say during his sermon at the Farewell Pilgrimage, 'Allah has given everyone their due right, so there is no bequest for an heir.'"

The comparison of these narrations leaves us with a swirl of uncertainties. First off, there's the ambiguity about whether the sermon in which the Prophet ﷺ declared, "إن الله قد أعطى كل ذي حق حقه فلا وصية لوارث" (Indeed, Allah has given each rightful person their due, so there is no bequest for an heir), was part of the Farewell Pilgrimage's grand sermon or some other sermon given that same year.

Then there's the borrowed Qadariyyah notion that prevents an heir's bequest by claiming "Allah has given each rightful person their due, so there is no need for human initiative in this matter." Some narrators of this hadith are known to be Qadariyyah adherents, adding another layer of complexity.

The accounts from Amr ibn Khurayjah and Anas ibn Malik, stating the Prophet ﷺ made these remarks while standing beneath a camel with its saliva dripping on them, suggest extreme care in reporting. Yet, when these narrations are read together, it's impossible to tell whether the camel's saliva was dripping on Amr ibn Khurayjah or Anas ibn Malik, as both narrate the same peculiar detail. These environmental inconsistencies muddle the overall narrative.

As for the narrators themselves, Shahr ibn Hawshab al-Shami in Amr ibn Khurayjah's narration is notoriously unreliable, even wanted for theft. Qatadah, infamous for his practice of tадل (concealing defects in narrators) and his Qadariyyah beliefs, adds to the mix. In other chains, Sa'id ibn Sa'id and Isma'il ibn Ayyash aren't considered reliable by hadith scholars.

Heavyweights like Alqamah, Ibn Khuzaymah, and Abdullah ibn Mubarak have harsh opinions about Isma'il ibn Ayyash.

In Anas's narration, besides Sa'id ibn Sa'id, the presence of Hisham ibn Ammar signals weakness. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal even suggested that anyone who prayed behind Hisham should pray again. These criticisms come from the very scholars who read the Sunnah as sacred history. When their own standards highlight these narrations' flaws, there's no reason to take them at face value or let them cloud the understanding of Quranic revelation.

⁶¹ Refer to the commentary on the mentioned verse in the works of Tabari and Qurtubi for further explanation.

⁶² It is reported that Umar persistently questioned the Prophet Muhammad about the inheritance issue concerning those without direct heirs, known as kalalah, to the extent that the Prophet, feeling exasperated, pointed out that the last verse of Surah An-Nisa should suffice for guidance. However, despite the Prophet's clarification, Umar remained perplexed about the specifics of a grandfather's inheritance rights until his death. According to the scholar Qastalani, who is noted for his commentary on Bukhari, Umar devised about a hundred different opinions on the matter and was unable to settle on a conclusive viewpoint. This enduring ambiguity can be appreciated considering that even Abu Bakr, a man of profound understanding and one of the Prophet's closest companions, expressed regret over not having documented the Prophet's guidance on three critical issues: the rules of kalalah, the inheritance rights of grandfathers, and certain types of usury. According to narratives that seem designed to question the Prophet's mission, Umar left this world regretting that the Prophet Muhammad had not clarified three matters to him. He believed that understanding these issues—the caliphate, the rules about kalalah (inheritance for those without direct heirs), and specific types of usury—would have been more valuable to him than anything else in the world. This is discussed by Shibli Nomani in his book "Al-Farooq," published in Azamgarh in 1331 Hijri, pages 214-215.

⁶³ Refer to the Book of Pilgrimage in Sahih Bukhari.

⁶⁴ See: Chapter on Tayammum, Kitaab al-Hayd, Sahih Muslim

⁶⁵ Refer to Shah Waliullah, "Izalat al-Khafa."

⁶⁶ Sahih Muslim, Book of Menstruation, page 458.

⁶⁷ In Nasai, the text of the hadith is as follows:

عن فاروق أن رجلاً أجنب فلم يصل فاتأ النبي ﷺ فذكر ذلك له، فقال: "أصبت". فأجنب رجل آخر فتيم
وصل فأتاه فقال له نحوً ما قال للآخر يعني: "أصبت".

Translation: Narrated from Farooq, a man became junub (in a state of major ritual impurity) and did not pray. He came to the Prophet ﷺ and mentioned this to him. The Prophet ﷺ said, "You did the right thing." Another man also became junub, performed tayammum (dry ablution), and prayed. He came to the Prophet ﷺ, who told him something similar, meaning, "You did the right thing."

⁶⁸ The varying interpretations of the Companions regarding Tayammum (dry ablution) are so highly regarded by our scholars that they venture into areas of interpretation which could potentially cast doubt on the character of the Prophet Muhammad. For instance, Shah Waliullah deduced that when the Prophet observed Umar and Ammar diverging in their interpretations of two Quranic verses—from Surah Ma'idah and Surah An-Nisa—he decided to let each adhere to their respective understandings. Shah Waliullah noted: ('فَصَوَّبَ كُلُّ التَّأْوِيلَيْنِ وَتَرَكَ كُلُّ مُؤَوِّلٍ عَلَى تَأْوِيلِهِ') ('He validated both interpretations and allowed each interpreter to maintain his own.'). (Izalat al-Khafa, Vol. 2, p. 89)

⁶⁹ Ibn Hazm addresses numerous contentious issues in Volume 2 of "Al-Ahkam," highlighting the considerable differences between the continuous Sunnah practiced by the people of Medina and the verbal Sunnah compiled by Imam Malik.

⁷⁰ Usama bin Zaid reported that he inquired from Qasim bin Muhammad about the practice of reciting silently behind the Imam during prayers where the Imam's recitation is not audible. Qasim responded: "If you choose to recite, you will find a precedent in some of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Similarly, if you choose not to recite, there are

also Companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who did not recite in such situations." (Jami' Bayan al-Ilm, Vol. 2, p. 80)

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See "Ahkam al-Quran" by al-Jassas, Volume 1, page 204.

⁷³ In his book "Aqd al-Jayyid," Shah Waliullah acknowledges the legitimacy of differing opinions among jurists, asserting that all jurists are correct in their interpretations simultaneously. He supports this view by citing various early scholars who shared this perspective. Shah Waliullah further notes that this view is prevalent among theologians, including those from both the Ash'ari and Mu'tazilah schools. For more details, refer to "Aqd al-Jayyid," pages 106-108.

⁷⁴ This hadith has been discussed earlier, and its weaknesses have been detailed. Here, it is presented in two different versions:

عن مقدام بن معدى كرب قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: "إلا إني أوتيت القرآن ومثله معه إلا يوشك رجل شبعان على أريكته يقول عليكم بهذا القرآن فما وجدتم فيه من حلال فأحلوه وما وجدتم فيه من حرام فحرموه، إنما حرم رسول الله كما حرم الله، إلا لا يحل لكم الحمار الألهي ولا كل ذي ناب من السباع." (رواه أبو داود والدارمي وابن ماجه)

Muqaddam bin Ma'dikarib reports that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "Indeed, I was given the Quran and something akin to it. Soon, a man full and reclining on his couch might claim adherence only to this Quran: what you find therein of the permissible, deem permissible; and what you find of the prohibited, deem prohibited. Truly, what the Messenger of Allah forbids is as Allah forbids. Note, domestic donkeys and all fanged beasts of prey are not lawful for you." (Reported by Abu Dawud, Al-Darimi, and Ibn Majah)

عن العرياض بن ساريه قال: قام رسول الله ﷺ فقال: "أيحسب أحدكم متكتناً على أريكته يظن أن الله لم يحرم شيئاً إلا ما في هذا القرآن، إلا وإن الله قد أمرت ووعظت ونبّهت عن أشياء إنها مثل القرآن أو أكثر." (رواه أبو داود)

Al-Arbad bin Sariyah narrates that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared, "Does one of you think, while reclining on his couch, that Allah has prohibited nothing except what is in this Quran? Verily, by Allah, I have

commanded, admonished, and prohibited things that are on par with the Quran, or even more so." (Reported by Abu Dawud)

⁷⁵ Refer to "Izalat al-Khafa," Volume 2, page 136.

⁷⁶ Before the revered Sahih Sittah—the six major Hadith collections—were compiled and canonized, Muslims viewed history through a critical lens, rather than a sacred one. Traditions and narrations didn't hold the weight they later acquired, a shift brought about by methodological missteps in compiling the Sahihain and other collections. Early Islamic scholars assessed narrations attributed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) within the essential framework of divine revelation, instead of relying solely on the narrators' testimonies. This critical approach is exemplified by scholars like Imam Malik, a foundational figure in the study of Hadith. Malik placed immense importance on the Sunnah, considering the practices of the people of Medina authoritative in certain contexts, and didn't hesitate to reject any hadiths conflicting with the fundamental framework of the Quran.

In Maliki jurisprudence, countless instances show where Imam Malik identified conflicts with the principle of easing hardship. Al-Shatibi, in "Al-Muwafaqat," details how prominent figures like Aisha, Ibn Abbas, and Umar bin Al-Khattab rejected certain narrations because they contradicted the Quranic view of life. This critical approach to traditions within the Quranic framework continued until the era of Imam Shafi'i.

Abu Hanifa's reluctance to heavily rely on narrations can be attributed to his geographical distance from Medina, residing instead in Kufa, and his preference for direct revelation over narrations, categorizing him among the People of Opinion (Ahl al-Ra'y). Despite the availability of these narrations, Imam Malik, a scholar from Medina and an authority on Hadith, adopted a different jurisprudential approach because history had not yet attained a sanctified status in his time.

Consider, for instance, the hadith stating that a vessel licked by a dog should be washed seven times. Malik argued that if the meat from a dog's hunt is permissible to eat, then there should be no reason to consider their

saliva objectionable. He admitted uncertainty about the authenticity of this hadith. Similarly, he challenged the hadith suggesting a son should fast on behalf of his deceased father, who owed fasts, with the Quranic verses, "No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another" (ولَا تَزِرْ وَازْرَةً وَزْرًا أَخْرَى) and "Man shall have nothing but what he strives for" (لَيْسَ لِلنَّاسِ إِلَّا مَا سعَى). These examples are thoroughly discussed in Al-Shatibi's "Al-Muwafaqat," specifically in volume 3, page 10.

⁷⁷ Allama Taftazani in his work "Tawzih wa Talwih" labels this hadith as a fabrication by heretics. He argues that this hadith contradicts the Quranic verse that instructs to accept what the Messenger gives and refrain from what he forbids {مَا أَنْهَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا هَبَّكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا}. Taftazani asserts that there is no inherent feature in the hadith suggesting it is a concoction or crafted by enemies of hadith. He emphasizes that verifying a hadith against the Quran before accepting it—to ascertain whether it aligns with the Messenger's teachings—reinforces the definitive and foundational role of the Quran. He sees no reason to deem this Quranic approach to verification as contradictory to either the Quran or hadith. However, for those who regard history as an enduring source of unrecited revelation, critiquing, analyzing, and validating history through the Quran may seem unnecessary.

It is widely accepted among scholars that the hadith in question contradicts both the Quran and Sunnah. Abdul Rahman Mehdi has promoted the view that this hadith was fabricated by the Khawarij and heretical groups, a stance generally supported by hadith scholars. However, Abdul Rahman Mehdi's assertion does not hold up under scholarly scrutiny. The Khawarij and heretics represent two opposing tendencies: the Khawarij are known for their rigid, justice-oriented, and forthright demeanor, while heretics are known for their corrupt beliefs. It is challenging to blame the creation of a hadith on these groups when their goals are so divergent. At most, one might argue that the hadith reflects the uncompromising nature of the Khawarij, but this does not detract from its authenticity. Even the harshest critics of the Khawarij acknowledge their

veracity. Imam Abu Dawud stated, "Among the misguided sects, the Khawarij have narrated the most authentic hadiths." Imam Ibn Taymiyyah noted, "These people do not deliberately lie; they are known for their sincerity and boldness." Generally, they are regarded as the most accurate in their hadith transmissions (Minhaj al-Sunnah, Vol. 3, p. 31).

It's baffling that hadith scholars have concluded this particular hadith, which plays a crucial role in determining the authenticity of narrations and does not fundamentally contradict divine revelation or its interpretation, was fabricated by heretics and the Khawarij. Equally perplexing is the basis on which the author of 'Awn al-Ma'bood (Vol. 4, p. 339) deemed this hadith incorrect and unfounded. Furthermore, it remains unclear why Zakariya Saji, citing Yahya ibn Ma'in, and Fitni, in his Tadhkirat al-Mawsoof, citing Khattabi, declared this hadith a creation of heretics.

⁷⁸ The extraordinary reverence shown by some prominent scholars for the Sahihayn (Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim) has led to the widespread perception that these works are beyond further debate or scrutiny. Eminent scholars like Ibn al-Salah, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathir, and Shah Waliullah have supported this stance. Shah Waliullah, in particular, expresses this in decisive terms, almost like issuing a fatwa against those who challenge the authority of these compilations. He states: "أَمَا الصَّحِيحَانِ فَقَدْ اتَّفَقَ الْمُحَدِّثُونَ عَلَى أَنَّ جَمِيعَ مَا فِيهِمَا مِنَ الْمُتَصَلِّ بِالْمَرْفُوعِ صَحِيحٌ بِالْقُطْعَ إِنَّمَا مَوْاتِرَانِ إِلَى مَصْنَفَيْهِمَا وَأَنَّهُ مِنْ يَرِنْ أَمْرَهُمَا فَهُوَ مُبْتَدِعٌ... غَيْرُ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ" (As for the two Sahihs, hadith scholars have unanimously agreed that all directly linked, elevated narrations within them are unequivocally authentic and have been continuously transmitted to their authors. Anyone who questions their status is considered an innovator, deviating from the path of the believers.) (Hujjat Allah al-Baligha, Vol. 1, p. 134)

The language used in "Fatawa Rashidiya" takes on an even more definitive and strict tone, emphasizing the sanctity of the Six Sahih books. These books, which contain the hadiths of the Prophet, were compiled by figures ranging from the Companions to later acknowledged and devout scholars, and are universally accepted by all Muslims as favored by Allah.

The text sternly warns that anyone who disparages these books or trivializes their compilation is effectively insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Such individuals are labeled as sinners, apostates, and cursed infidels, condemned by divine will. (Fatawa Rashidiya, Vol. 2, p. 13)

⁷⁹ For more details, refer to "Al-Muhalla" and "Ahkam fi Usul al-Ahkam" by Ibn Hazm, as well as "I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in" and "Madhab Ahl al-Madinah" by Shaykh al-Islam.

⁸⁰ See: Preface to translation of Sahih Muslim, by Waheed uz-Zaman, Volume 1, page 11.

⁸¹ One reason for the complexities in Hadith transmission might be the effort to minimize the number of narrators. Another issue is scholars' perceptions that certain narrators are not as reliable as others. For instance, while Warqah bin Umar Yashkuri is generally considered trustworthy, Bukhari does not view him as reliable or consistent in the narrations from Mansur bin al-Mu'tamir. Similarly, although Wadah bin Abdullah is widely accepted as trustworthy, Bukhari does not find his narrations from Qatadah reliable. The same is true for Walid bin Muslim al-Dimashqi, whose reports linked to Imam Malik are not highly regarded by Bukhari. These examples highlight Bukhari's strict standards and suggest that he favored shorter, more controlled chains of narrators for his compilation, "Sahih al-Bukhari." However, this approach leads to questions about the overall reliability and acceptance of narrators who are deemed untrustworthy in specific contexts or are not preferred over other transmission chains.

⁸² The authors of the Six Sahih books, especially Bukhari and Muslim, are recognized for their scholarly excellence and high standards. They were esteemed as great scholars and pious figures of their time, fully aware of the significant and delicate responsibility of compiling hadiths. Despite their sense of duty, they were not immune to human traits. Like any devout individuals in their society, they were influenced by the contemporary issues, political circumstances, rivalries, and their personal preferences and biases. However, those who regard the compilation of the Six Sahih books as divinely guided often overlook the human biases that might have

influenced this monumental scholarly work. This lack of critical perspective and reliance on tradition inhibits a healthy engagement with this valuable cultural treasure. Consequently, it elevates the Six Sahih books and other hadith collections to a status in Islamic thought akin to that which the Talmud holds among Jews.

During the debate over the creation of the Quran between Imam Muhammad bin Yahya al-Dhuhli and Imam Bukhari, which significantly intensified the atmosphere in Nishapur and split the community into two distinct factions, Imam Muslim—who had studied under both scholars—chose to support Imam Bukhari. In a strong reaction against Imam Dhuhli, his other teacher, Imam Muslim took a drastic step: he loaded all the hadith manuscripts he had recorded from Imam Dhuhli onto camels and sent them back. This dramatic gesture signaled not just his withdrawal from his discipleship under Imam Dhuhli, but also his complete rejection of the hadiths he had once accepted from him, deeming them unreliable.

This illustrates that during rivalries among contemporaries, choosing a side often required a complete separation from the other. It's impractical to discard an entire collection of hadiths merely due to scholarly disagreements. These instances highlight that, despite their significant scholarly achievements, the compilers of the Sahih Sittah were still human. Consequently, their works should be treated as valuable historical and academic resources, rather than as texts of unrecited revelation.
(Introduction to *Fath al-Bari*)

⁸³ It is important to note that until the fifth century AH, only five books were considered part of the core collections of Sahih Hadith. However, Hafiz Abu al-Fadl Muhammad ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi (d. 507 AH) was the first to include Ibn Majah among the primary books in his work "Shurut al-A'immah al-Sittah," thereby establishing the six canonical books of Sahih Hadith. After Abu al-Fadl, another contemporary scholar, Zarun ibn Mu'awiyah al-Maliki (d. 550 AH), did not include Ibn Majah in his collection "Al-Tajrid lil-Sahih wal-Sunan." Instead, he counted Muwatta Imam Malik alongside the other five books, also making the total number

six. Thus, the debate continued about which books should actually be considered part of the Sahih collections.

The term "Sahih Sittah" became so well-known that, regardless of the exact composition of the collection, it came to be regarded as the definitive source of Sunnah. In the eighth century AH, a renowned scholar, Hafiz Salah al-Din Khalil (d. 761 AH), suggested that it would be more appropriate to include Sunan al-Darimi in place of Ibn Majah in the collection of six books. He argued that Sunan al-Darimi contains fewer weak, rejected, and anomalous narrations compared to Ibn Majah, and that it is technically superior. However, this view did not gain widespread acceptance, and the canonization of the six books of Sahih Hadith, as established by earlier scholars, remained unchanged.

⁸⁴ Both historical records and divine revelation refute the idea that the Companions of the Prophet compiled any collection of sayings and traditions. The same community that meticulously preserved the copies of the Quran prepared during Uthman's era, thereby establishing the continuity of its written form, would have surely retained even incomplete versions of such collections if they had existed.

The Quranic verse, "O mankind, there has come to you a good advice from your Lord and a healing for that which is in your breasts—a guidance and a mercy for the believers. Say, 'In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy—in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate'" (Yunus: 57-58), and the explicit command of the Prophet, "Do not write anything from me," make it inconceivable that any Companion would have disregarded these instructions.

⁸⁵ In the renowned book on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, "Kashf" by Bazdawi, it is stated that "khabar mashhoor" (well-known reports) refers to those narrations which were once considered isolated (ahad) but were later accepted by the scholars of the first and second centuries (early generations of Islam). This acceptance elevated their status to "mashhoor" (well-known). Regarding the subsequent periods, the author of "Kashf" writes:

"والاعتبار للاشتئار في القرن الثاني و الثالث ولاعبرة للاشتئار في القرون التي بعد القرون الثلاثة"

Translation: "The criterion for 'mashhoor' is its recognition in the second and third centuries (the era of the Tabi'in and the Tabi' Tabi'in). However, the recognition in the centuries after the third century is not considered valid." (Kashf, Vol. 2, p. 369)

⁸⁶ Shah Waliullah's original text is as follows:

ومثال آخر روى الشیخان انه كان من مذهب عمر بن خطاب ان التیم لا یجزی للجنب الذي لا یجدو ماء فروی عنده عمار انه كان مع الرسول صلی الله علیه وسلم في سفر فتمسک في التراب فذکر ذلك للرسول الله صلی الله علیه وسلم فقال الرسول صلی الله علیه وسلم إنما كان يکفیك ان تفعل هکذا وضرب بيده الأرض فمسح بما وجہه ویده فلم یقبل عمرو لم یهض عنده حجۃ لقادح خفی رأه فيه حق استفاض الحديث في الطبقة الثانية من طرق كثيرة واصمحل وهم القادح فأخذوا بهـ (حجۃ الله البالغة، ج ١، ص ١١٣)

This can be translated into English as:

"And another example reported by the two Sheikhs is from the opinion of Umar ibn Khattab that dry ablution (tayammum) does not suffice for someone in a state of major ritual impurity (janabah) who does not find water. It is reported from Ammar that he was with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on a journey when he needed to purify himself with soil. He mentioned this to the Prophet (peace be upon him), who said, 'It would have sufficed you to do this,' and he struck the ground with his hand, then wiped his face and hands with it. Ammar did not accept this since he did not see it as a valid proof until the narrative became widespread in the second generation from many chains of transmission, and the doubt diminished, so they accepted it." (Hujjat Allah al-Baligha, Vol. 1, p. 113)

Tayammum (dry ablution) is established through the Quran and consensus among the community. Most scholars agree that two strikes are necessary in Tayammum: one for the face and another for both arms up to the elbows. This practice is reported from notable figures such as Ali ibn Abi Talib, Abdullah ibn Umar, Hasan al-Basri, Salim, Sufyan al-Thawri, Malik, and Abu Hanifa. On the other hand, some scholars argue that a single strike is enough to wipe the face and both palms. This view is

supported by Ata, Makhul, Awza'i, Ahmad, Ishaq ibn Rahawayh, and many Hadith scholars. Az-Zuhri reportedly stated that wiping up to the armpits is necessary, while Ibn Sirin believed that three strikes are required—one for the face, one for the palms, and one for the arms. This is to cover both minor and major ritual impurities, including janabah (state of major ritual impurity). There is a consensus that Tayammum is valid for both types of impurities. However, there is a report that Umar and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud initially did not believe Tayammum was sufficient for janabah, but they reportedly later retracted this view.

If there is impurity on a part of the body not typically washed during ablution, it is not permissible to substitute Tayammum for washing that area. Imam Ahmad, however, permits this practice. Other scholars like Sufyan al-Thawri, al-Awza'i, and Abu Thawr recommend wiping it with soil instead. Once Tayammum has been performed and the prayer completed, finding water afterwards does not necessitate repeating the prayer. According to Al-Shafi'i, Ahmad, Ibn Mundhir, and Dawud al-Zahiri, the soil used for Tayammum must be clean and dusty. In contrast, Abu Hanifa and Malik agree that Tayammum is valid with any type of earth, even if it is not dusty, such as clean, washed lime. Additionally, Maliki scholars allow Tayammum on wood and even ice. (Sahih Muslim, Vol. 1, p. 554, translated by Waheed uz Zaman)

⁸⁷ In Sahih Bukhari, a narration from Aisha describes that the Prophet Muhammad was affected by magic. Another narration in both Bukhari and Muslim mentions that he sometimes thought he had done something which he had not actually done. Abu Bakr al-Jassas criticizes these narrations in his book "Ahkam al-Quran," dismissing them as fabrications by heretics. He argues that accepting these reports would contradict the Quranic views expressed in the verses (But the magicians will never succeed, no matter where they come) and (The wrongdoers say, 'You follow none but a man bewitched.'). This issue is related to fundamental beliefs, and the general consensus among scholars is that foundational beliefs should not be based

on solitary reports. Despite these considerations, the idea that the Prophet was bewitched is widely discussed and popularized in Tafsir literature.

⁸⁸ For a detailed discussion on the issue, please refer to the relevant notes in *Liberating the Quran: A Painful Saga of How We Lost Touch with the Divine Revelation* by Rashid Shaz, published in New Delhi, 2024.

⁸⁹ The misconception that the Prophet Muhammad was illiterate, a notion propagated by the enemies of Islam, is unequivocally refuted by the Quran. For a thorough discussion on this topic, refer to footnote number 53 in *Liberating the Quran: A Painful Saga of How We Lost Touch with the Divine Revelation* by Rashid Shaz, published in New Delhi, 2024.

⁹⁰ The concept of "unrecited revelation" unfurls like a boundless sea, vast and deep, far beyond what the collections of Sahih Sittah can contain. Consider Musnad Ahmad: it's almost a mythical trove, aiming to encapsulate every hadith under the sun, painting a comprehensive tableau of divine whispers. Imam Ahmad himself purportedly saw this book as a beacon, a definitive guide. Yet, some contend that any hadith not archived within its pages doesn't count—how painfully narrow! Our astute hadith scholars have consistently unearthed treasures of authentic narrations far beyond the confines of Musnad Ahmad. Shah Abdul Aziz, in his "Bustan al-Muhaddithin," hinted that Imam Ahmad might have simply suggested that the excluded hadiths hadn't reached the fame or consensus necessary to be included. But let's not be fooled—many renowned and authentic hadiths roam free outside of Musnad Ahmad's borders.

It's essential to realize that not all collections crafted by the contemporaries, predecessors, or successors of the Sahih Sittah compilers find refuge in these six books. Hence, there's absolutely no reason to tether our souls to the Sahih Sittah as the sole sanctuaries of hadith. This is why, in our rich tapestry of jurisprudential debates, scholarly discourses, and exegetical insights, we often stumble upon references to other, less-famous collections of hadiths alongside the venerated Sahih Sittah.

How then can we possibly dismiss the substantial compilations of Ibn Hibban, Al-Hakim, Zia Maqdisi, Ibn Khuzaimah, and others? If we trust the Sunan of Abu Dawood and Nasa'i, why not open our arms to the

Musnad Abbasi, Musnad Abd al-Razzaq, and the treasure troves of others? Moreover, if Musnad Ahmad can be a vast ocean of hadiths for us, why deny the legitimacy of the enrichments by Ibn Ahmad, the Musannaf by Abu Bakr Ibn Abi Shaybah, or the profound depths of Tahdhib by Ibn Jarir and others?

⁹¹ Efforts have been made to elevate Bukhari from a scholarly compilation to the definitive collection of the Prophet's sayings and thoughts through the use of dream narratives. These narratives seek to position this monumental human endeavor as if it were divinely orchestrated, akin to being authored by the Prophet himself. The influence of these dreams extends not only to the general public but has also captivated many prominent scholars. Despite their awareness, these scholars recognize that using dreams to establish the scholarly validity of a book is neither an academic method nor a legitimate way in Islam to determine authenticity or legality. Shah Waliullah, a seminal figure in modern Muslim thought, has deemed it sufficient to rely on dreams over historical principles for validating the authenticity of Bukhari. Waliullah writes in Hujjatullah Albaligha:

"بلغنا أن رجلاً من الصالحين رأى رسول الله ﷺ في منامه وهو يقول: مالك اشتغلت بفقهه محمد بن إدريس وترك كتابي؟ قال: يا رسول الله، ما كتابك؟ قال: الصحيح البخاري. ولعمري، نال من الشهرة والقبول درجة لا ترام فوقها."

Translation: "It has been conveyed to us that a righteous man saw the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in his dream, who asked him, 'Why are you so engrossed in the jurisprudence of Muhammad ibn Idris and have abandoned my book?' The man asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, which book is yours?' The Prophet replied, 'الصحيح البخاري.' By my life, it has achieved a level of fame and acceptance that cannot be surpassed."

⁹² Refer to "Seerat Bukhari," op. cit., Volume 2, page 25

⁹³ In addition to conventional scholarly methods involving the transmission and analysis of texts, Bukhari's work is attributed with a particular infallibility reinforced through spiritual disciplines of prudence. It is frequently mentioned that Imam Bukhari refrained from incorporating

any hadith into his compilation, *Al-Jami al-Sahih*, until he had performed a full ablution (*ghusl*) and prayed two units of prayer. Some accounts state that Imam Bukhari composed his work in the *Masjid al-Haram*, where he performed two units of prayer for *Istikhara* before including each hadith. Other reports suggest he wrote the chapter headings of his book while positioned between the Prophet's chamber and the pulpit, sanctifying each chapter by praying two units of prayer. To address these varied accounts, experts have proposed different phases of compilation within the sacred precincts. However, it's been overlooked whether it was necessary for Bukhari to perform full ablutions (*ghusl*) for each prayer session, when simple ablution (*wudu*) might have been adequate. Perhaps the narrators believed that a full ablution (*ghusl*) was necessary for *Istikhara* prayers, or they thought that prayers performed after a *ghusl* could provide clearer divine guidance. Imagine a compilation in which each entry involved *ghusl*, prayer, and *Istikhara*, written near the Prophet's chamber and within the *Masjid al-Haram*—how could there be any doubt about its authenticity among the faithful? Yet, a bit of critical reflection is sufficient to recognize that even a work created in such a revered setting should not be beyond scholarly scrutiny and discussion.

It is reported that Imam Bukhari devoted sixteen years to compiling *Sahih Bukhari*, which contains approximately 7,000 hadiths, including repetitions. Over those sixteen years—about 6,000 days—this would average to one or two hadiths recorded daily. The notion that each hadith required multiple full ablutions (*ghusl*) and prayers for divine guidance (*Salat al-Istikhara*) throughout the day seems impractical, given the volume of work and the daily routines that would need managing. In Islamic culture, scholars and devout individuals commonly start their daily activities with routine ablution and the prayer of two voluntary units (*nawafil*) before commencing their teaching sessions. Expecting Imam Bukhari to maintain such a practice is reasonable; however, portraying his daily routine as requiring sanctified rituals for each action is unnecessary and likely exaggerates the actual practices.

⁹⁴ Refer to Muhammad Ismail Salafi, "Hujjat al-Hadith," Lahore, 1981, page 83.

⁹⁵ A brief overview of the chronological and geographical details of the non-Arab authors of the six major hadith collections:

Sahih Bukhari, authored by Muhammad Ismail from Bukhara. Born in 194 AH / 810 CE, died in 256 AH / 870 CE.

Sahih Muslim, authored by Abu al-Hassan from Nishapur. Born in 204 AH / 819 CE, died in 261 AH / 875 CE.

Sunan Abu Dawood, authored by Abu Dawood Suleiman from Bustan. Born in 202 AH / 817 CE, died in 275 AH / 888 CE.

Jami' al-Tirmidhi, authored by Abu Isa Muhammad from Tirmidh (Balkh). Born in 209 AH / 824 CE, died in 279 AH / 892 CE.

Sunan Ibn Majah, authored by Abu Abdulla from Qazvin. Born in 209 AH / 824 CE, died in 273 AH / 886 CE.

Sunan al-Nasa'i, authored by Abu Abdulrahman Ahmad from Nasa (Khorasan). Born in 214 AH / 826 CE, died in 303 AH / 915 CE.

⁹⁶ Refer to the introduction of "Fath al-Bari."

⁹⁷ The hadiths that describe Islam as initially fragile and foretell its eventual decline, condensing back into Medina like a snake into its burrow, are not mere expressions of destiny. They seem to be concocted with severe hostility towards the religion, crafted to undermine its definitive and eternal nature. It's as if their creators aim يريدون ليطفئوا نور الله بأفواهم والله متم نوره — "ولو كره الكافرون" — "to extinguish the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will complete His light, even though the disbelievers dislike it." Such hadiths that predict the demise of Islam or depict the fragmentation of the Muslim community as prophesied by the Prophet are highly suspect in terms of their authenticity.

⁹⁸ In tackling the critiques laid out by orientalists about the history of Hadith, the defensive tone in our literature is stark and unmistakable. These responses, so fervently penned, scarcely make room for a fair appraisal of opposing views. They don't pause to acknowledge what might be accurate, nor do they bother to pinpoint where the misunderstandings

lie. Instead, they launch into polemics, designed more to quash dissent than to engage in any real scholarly dialogue. This kind of approach doesn't just miss the mark—it locks the door on any potential enlightenment from external critiques, shutting out illuminating insights that could have been. Orientalists, let's admit, haven't always written dispassionately; they've wielded their pens sometimes with bias, sometimes ensnared by their own misconceptions. Yet, when poring over their texts, it's crucial we don't get caught in a trap of fear—fear that their words might genuinely threaten the fabric of Islamic thought or that defending Islam against every criticism becomes our crusade. Islam has never been frail against the tide of human queries. The only thing ever really at risk? The muddles of thought concocted by our own scholars. Islam itself remains unscathed.

The quandaries posed by orientalists like Goldziher, Schacht, and Juynboll about the intricacies of Hadith literature? They're not exactly dropping bombshells here. From the get-go, as the sands of Islamic history shifted, you could see the intellectual tectonic plates forming two major schools: the People of Opinion and the People of Hadith. These currents weren't strangers to merging at times in those nascent centuries. Imam Shafi'i, in his "Kitab al-Umm," spills pages on his fiery exchanges with those who pushed back against the Hadith. So, when Schacht and Goldziher waded into this territory, they were treading on familiar ground, stirring skepticism that wasn't foreign to our scholastic traditions. Their insights weren't earth-shattering revelations that threatened to unravel the fabric of Islamic thought. Yet, there's a twist—because these views surfaced from orientalists at a juncture when the Muslim collective was already a fraying tapestry, and Islamic thought was reeling under the dual pressure of internal rigidity and external sieges. In that storm, their critiques were seen not just as scholarly comments but as full-blown assaults on Islam itself, turning outright rejection into a badge of faith.

Goldziher posits that Hadiths are later fabrications, stitched into tradition through chains of narration as time marched on—a sweeping claim that fumbles even against his own historical benchmarks. Schacht

takes a similar leap, arguing that the roots of traditional understanding, or the body of the religion as we might say, sprang up towards the tail end of the first century, bleeding into the second. Juynboll, not to be outdone in the speculation stakes, suggests pushing the timeline of Hadith literature back by merely a quarter century. These theories, though audacious and wrapped in academic bravado, are vulnerable to debunking by the very sources that these scholars have tethered their arguments to.

Turning the gaze back, the narrations trace their lineage not merely to the Companions but right back to the Prophet Muhammad himself. The earliest Muslims didn't sanctify history; they recognized it as mutable, influenced by the divine but not divinity itself. This nuanced understanding preserved the narratives within a defined frame—acknowledged, yes, but not deified. Modern Muslim writers, however, often leap to history's defense, countering orientalist critiques with a fervor that suggests not just scholarly rebuttal but a guarding of the faith itself. These responses, steeped in a defensive zeal, argue that to question our threadbare historical tapestries is to assault Islam at its foundation. For those holding history as a bastion of Sunnah, its preservation becomes synonymous with the preservation of religion itself—an entanglement of identity and ideology where history becomes hallowed ground.

Refer to:

I. Goldziher's "Muslim Studies," edited by S.M. Stern and translated by C.R. Barber & S.M. Stern, in two volumes (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967-71), particularly pages 17-251 of volume II.

Joseph Schacht's "The Origins of Mohammedan Jurisprudence" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950).

G.H.A. Juynboll's "Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance & Authorship of Early Hadith" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

M.M. Azmi's "On Schacht's Origins of Mohammedan Jurisprudence" (New York: John Wiley, 1985).

Fazlur Rahman's "Islam," specifically chapter 3.

⁹⁹ Sufyan al-Thawri was known for his meticulous choice of words when discussing differing interpretations. Ash-Sha'rani noted his advice: قال سفيان الثوري: لا تقولوا اختلف العلماء في كذا وقولوا قد وسع العلماء على الأمة بكل ذا This translates to: "Do not say 'the scholars have differed on this'; rather say 'the scholars have provided ease for the community on this'."

(Munazir Ahsan Gilani, Moqaddama, Tadween Fiqh, Lahore, 1976, p. 217).

¹⁰⁰ Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz is reputed to have said that he would have been displeased if the Companions had not disagreed, because their disagreements provided flexibility in religious interpretation. Similarly, a narration attributed to Ibn Abbas states, "The differences among my Companions are a mercy for you."

(Source: Habib al-Rahman Kandhlawi, *Mazhabi Dastanen aur unki Haqeeqat* 'Religious Stories and Their Realities,' Vol. 2, p. 229)

¹⁰¹ The endeavor to understand religion through its historical context has opened a wide gateway to jurisprudential differences, which continue to spark debates within the community even after centuries. Consider, for example, the issue regarding the obligatory bath for someone in a state of major ritual impurity. Here, the varying narrations ultimately push us towards relying on the opinions of scholars, rather than on directly received revelations.

In his Book of Menstruation, Sahih Muslim includes two hadiths that offer conflicting guidelines on when the ritual bath (ghusl) is required. The first hadith, transmitted by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, suggests that a bath is not required without ejaculation, as per the Prophet's words: "إِنَّمَا الْمَاءُ مِنَ الْمَاءِ" (Water is only due to water). In contrast, another narration from Abu Hurairah indicates that engaging in intercourse necessitates a bath, regardless of ejaculation: "إِذَا جَلَسَ بَيْنَ شَعْمَهَا الْأَرْبَعَةِ ثُمَّ جَهَدَهَا فَقَدْ وَجَبَ عَلَيْهِ الْغُسْلُ" (If he sits between her four limbs and then exerts himself, then he must perform ghusl, even if he does not ejaculate). To reconcile these contradictions, Muslim presents a perspective from Abu al-'Ala ibn Shikhair, explaining that one hadith can abrogate another just as one Quranic verse can abrogate another. The determination of which

conflicting hadith is genuinely abrogated hinges entirely on historical context. Al-Nawawi, a respected commentator on these hadiths, argues that the community now unanimously agrees that ghusl (ritual purification) is obligatory merely from sexual contact, thus considering the hadith "Water is only due to water" as abrogated. While Nawawi asserts this consensus and discusses the abrogation of one hadith by another, he also highlights a contrasting view from Ibn Abbas. According to Ibn Abbas, this hadith is not abrogated but instead applies specifically to scenarios involving wet dreams—situations where intercourse occurs in a dream without any physical signs of ejaculation upon waking.

Those who see the conjectural collections of traditions and hadiths as sources of Sharia and believe that religious guidance requires historical support face a significant dilemma with the conflicting statements attributed to the Prophet. This issue not only remains unresolved, but it also complicates the ability of ordinary people to discern the truth. These conflicting views are often held in equal regard and treated as equally authentic, forcing laypeople to depend on the interpretations of contemporary jurists and to accept their versions of truth, since ordinary intellects struggle to make definitive decisions in such complex matters. Even for esteemed jurists and hadith scholars, the only option often remains to choose one opinion over another based on personal discretion. The diverse and conflicting opinions found in jurisprudential matters stem from our reliance on history to dictate divine guidance, presenting divergent views under the banner of Sharia on the same issues.

The efforts to reconcile the diverse and often conflicting views presented in historical and traditional texts through consensus have inadvertently given precedence to human opinions over the prophetic sayings. This approach has led our jurists and scholars into intellectual territories where they have devoted significant energy to addressing potential issues that were traditionally considered off-limits. Al-Nawawi, in discussing the unanimous agreement among scholars regarding the requirement for ablution following intercourse without ejaculation,

explicitly states: "Our scholars have determined that ablution is necessary if the tip of the penis enters the anus of either a woman or a man, or the vagina of an animal, irrespective of whether the partner is alive or dead, and regardless of whether the act was accidental or intentional, forced or consensual." (Cited from Sahih Muslim, Vol. 1, translated by Waheed uz Zaman, Book of Menstruation, p. 446, Lahore 1981)

In their quest for ritual cleanliness, our jurists and commentators have explored scenarios that Islam does not condone. For someone engaged in deeply sinful and impure actions, the importance of prescribed Islamic purification methods becomes questionable. Suggesting that traditional ablutions can purify such individuals echoes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees criticized by Jesus, who accused them of straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel.

Glossary

Ahad (أحاد) - refers to isolated reports or narratives in Islamic hadith literature that do not meet the criteria of tawatur (continuous testimony). These reports are transmitted by a limited number of narrators and are considered less authoritative and reliable compared to mutawatir hadith, which are transmitted by a large number of people through unbroken chains, ensuring their authenticity. Ahad hadith play a peripheral role in the foundational aspects of faith and should not redefine truths passed down through more robust chains of transmission.

Ahl al-Dhimmah (أهل الْذِمَّة) refers to non-Muslims living under Muslim protection within an Islamic state. This status is granted through a dhimmah contract, which ensures their safety, religious freedom, and property rights in exchange for a tax called jizya. They play significant societal roles and are afforded comprehensive rights and protections. This relationship is based on principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence, reflecting the broader Islamic values of tolerance and inclusivity.

Ahl al-Kitab (أهل الكتاب), or 'People of the Book,' primarily refers to Jews and Christians. This term highlights their recognition in Islamic theology as recipients of earlier divine revelations through scriptures like the Torah and the Bible. The historical and theological interactions between Muslims and Ahl al-Kitab are characterized by mutual recognition of monotheism and shared prophetic traditions, yet distinct theological differences. They are afforded a unique status within Islamic law, granting them certain protections and rights under Muslim governance, reflecting principles of coexistence and respect for religious plurality.

Aqidah (عقيدة) is defined as the set of core beliefs in Islam, encompassing the fundamental principles that shape Muslim identity and practice. These beliefs include faith in the oneness of God

(Tawhid), the prophets, the revealed scriptures, the angels, the Day of Judgment, and divine predestination. Aqidah serves as the theological foundation for a Muslim's faith and actions, profoundly influencing their worldview, religious observances, and ethical conduct.

Asbab al-Nuzul (أسباب النزول), traditionally understood as the circumstances surrounding the revelation of specific Quranic verses, is critically reassessed in this book. It challenges the conventional reliance on Asbab al-Nuzul for interpreting the Quran, arguing that these narratives, often based on isolated historical reports, should not be used to dictate the understanding of the divine message. The book posits that the historical context, frequently derived from solitary sources, is insufficient to unlock the meanings of revelations intended for universal and timeless application.

Bid'ah (بدعة), often translated as 'innovation', refers to the introduction of new practices into Islamic faith and worship that are not substantiated by authoritative texts or the actions of the Prophet Muhammad. Traditionally treated with caution within Islamic tradition, bid'ah is seen as a potential source of deviation from the original teachings of Islam, as preserved in the Sunnah. Basmala (بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم): Mentioned in discussions about its use in daily activities and Islamic rituals, emphasizing its significance in representing the essence of invoking God's name before any action.

Bay'ah (بيعة): Explored within the historical context of Islamic governance, representing a pledge of allegiance to a leader, and its evolution in Islamic political systems.

Caliphate (خلافة) - The Caliphate represents the Islamic state under the leadership of a Caliph, who is considered a political and religious successor to the Prophet Muhammad. In the context of Hadith transmission and interpretation, the Caliphate played a pivotal role, where political dynamics significantly influenced religious doctrines.

Companions (صحابة): Described as the followers of Prophet Muhammad who had direct interactions with him.

Consensus (جماع) - is a foundational principle in Islamic jurisprudence, referring to the agreement of Islamic scholars on a particular theological or legal issue.

Da'if (ضعيف): translated as 'weak', is a term used in the classification of Hadith to denote those narrations considered less reliable due to issues in their chain of transmission or the credibility of their narrators. This classification is critical in Islamic scholarship, as it helps determine the authenticity and applicability of Hadiths in forming legal and theological judgments. The designation of a Hadith as Da'if does not necessarily exclude it from scholarly consideration but indicates that it requires careful scrutiny and is generally not strong enough to establish legal rulings independently.

Dar al-Harb (دار الحرب): which translates to "house of war," is a term used in Islamic jurisprudence to describe territories not under Muslim rule. It denotes regions where the Islamic legal framework, or Sharia, is not established, framing the traditional legal and ethical considerations for interactions between Muslims and such territories. This concept is significant for understanding the dynamics of Islamic legal theory concerning international relations and the conditions under which peace, treaties, and war are justified.

Ehsan (إحسان): Discussed as the highest level of faith in Islam, referring to doing good and seeking perfection in worship as though one sees Allah, or at the very least, being conscious that Allah sees them.

Ejma (جماع) - or consensus, refers to the agreement among Islamic scholars on a theological or legal issue. This concept is traditionally viewed as a critical doctrinal tool within Islamic jurisprudence, lending authoritative weight to scholarly opinions and rulings.

Fiqh (فقه) - translated as understanding or jurisprudence, refers to the human interpretation and application of Islamic divine law, derived primarily from the Quran and Sunnah.

Fatwa (فتوى) - is defined as a legal opinion or decree issued by an Islamic scholar. It plays a crucial role in guiding Islamic social norms

and legal practices, necessitating contextual and nuanced interpretations.

Ghusl (غسل) - The term for the full-body ritual purification required in Islam under certain conditions.

Ghayb (غيب): refers to the concept of the unseen in Islamic theology. It encompasses belief in elements beyond human perception, such as Allah, angels, the hereafter, and divine destiny. These beliefs are fundamental to shaping a Muslim's worldview.

Hijra (هجرة) - The migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Hafiz (حافظ) - traditionally used to describe someone who has memorized the Quran in its entirety, also held a specialized meaning in the early Islamic era. At that time, Quran scholars were often referred to as Qurra, but the term Hafiz was specifically reserved for those who had memorized Hadiths.

Ijma (إجماع) - refers to the consensus among Islamic scholars on religious matters.

Ijtihad (اجتہاد) - The process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources.

Isnad (إسناد) - The chain of narrators that reports a hadith.

Jihad (جہاد) - Jihad encompasses both the spiritual struggle against sin and the physical struggle to uphold the faith, which can include combat under specific conditions. Traditional interpretations of Jihad are broadened to emphasize its non-violent aspects, focusing on personal development and communal harmony.

Jahiliyyah (جهالیۃ) - Refers to the period of ignorance before the advent of Islam.

Kalalah (کلalah) - Kalalah is a term that refers to an individual who dies without direct heirs, such as children or parents. Traditionally, the definition and application of Kalalah have been critical in determining inheritance distributions under Islamic law.

Kalam (كalam) - refers to Islamic theological discourse. It focuses on the discussion and rational examination of Islamic beliefs, particularly regarding the attributes of God and the nature of the Quran.

Madhab (منهج) - refers to a school of thought within Islamic jurisprudence. The evolution of the four major Madhhabs—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—is critical to understanding the diversity of Islamic legal thought.

Mufti (مفتي) - is a religious legal scholar authorized to interpret and expound upon Sharia, Islamic law. The role of Muftis in Islamic society is multifaceted, encompassing the issuance of Fatwas—legal opinions that guide Muslims on various aspects of life and law.

Musnad (مسند) - Musnad refers to a type of Hadith collection in which Hadiths are organized according to the Companions who reported them. This method of organization facilitates the study of Hadith by tracing the transmissions back to specific Companions, thereby enhancing the understanding of the chain of narrators and the context of each Hadith.

Naskh (نسخ), within Islamic jurisprudence, refers to the abrogation of religious texts, where a later revelation may supersede or cancel an earlier one. This concept has traditionally been used to reconcile apparent contradictions within the Quran or between the Quran and Hadith. However, the perspective presented highlights a critical view, asserting that the Quran, intended for all times, does not contain verses that nullify each other.

Qiyas (قياس), within Islamic jurisprudence, involves the process of deductive analogy, where the teachings of the Quran and Hadith are extrapolated to new situations not explicitly addressed in the scriptures. This method allows Islamic law to adapt to changing circumstances by applying established principles to contemporary issues.

Riba (ربا) - The term for usury or interest, which is prohibited in Islam.

Sahih (صحيح) - the classification of Hadith into Sahih, meaning 'sound' or 'authentic'.

Sunnah (سنّة) - a central concept in Islamic jurisprudence, represents the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad. It encompasses his actions, sayings, and approvals that serve as a model for Muslims in religious, social, and legal matters.

Sharia (شريعة), often translated as Islamic law, is derived from the Quran and the Sunnah, forming the comprehensive legal and ethical framework for Muslims.

Tawatur (تواتر) - refers to the transmission of a Hadith by such a large number of people across multiple chains of transmission that it is virtually inconceivable for them to all agree on a falsehood, thereby ensuring its authenticity. This concept is crucial in establishing the unquestioned reliability of certain Hadiths within Islamic tradition.

Tafsir (تفسير) - refers to the interpretation or exegesis of the Quran, a critical scholarly endeavor to understand the meanings and messages of the Quranic text.

Ummah (أمة) - the collective community of Muslims bound by shared faith, transcending ethnic and geographical lines.

Usul al-Fiqh (أصول الفقه) - refers to the foundational principles and methodologies used in Islamic jurisprudence to derive legal rulings from religious texts, such as the Quran and Hadith.

Uswah (آسوة), a Quranic term, refers to the exemplary model of the Prophet Muhammad, which encompasses his behaviors, decisions, and spiritual practices as the ideal conduct for Muslims. Over the centuries, the concept of Uswah has been diluted, as it was often loosely equated with Sunnah or Hadith. This has led people to seek the Prophet's example outside the Quran, particularly in historical chronicles of his time.

